

The Second Use of the Gospel in Lutheran Reformation Theology – Part II

Colleagues,

This week's ThTh posting brings the conclusion of a two-part essay by pastor Timothy Hoyer of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Lakewood, New York. In this very week the homosexuality issue is on the agenda of the ELCA's national assembly in Orlando, Florida. Sadly, the public debate in our denomination (as well as all the others I've heard about) has been on two apparently antithetical versions of the "third use" of God's law—one allegedly traditional, the other not so. But both claiming to show "what the Bible says is permissible." So despite the apparent antitheses (to use one of Luther's images) they are like two foxes running in opposite directions, but their tails are tied together. And what is the tie that binds? The common concern to have God tell us what is permitted, what is "kosher." It's a third-use of the law issue.

Hoyer claims that the Lutheran Reformation tied distinctively Christian ethics to the second use of God's gospel—and not to the law at all. Although he doesn't say it, I will: Things could be different in Orlando if the ELCA could "go and do likewise." It's so Lutheran.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Hoyer's text, Part II

Now the two questions used to test all Christian teaching will applied to what "some say," as was listed earlier. [Does it "use" the merits and benefits of the death and rising of Christ? Does it "use" them to comfort consciences (give the benefits of Christ to those who need them)?]

Those who are concerned that a Christian's life should be guided by the law will say that they want to uphold Scripture, obey the word of God, that the Bible is the source and norm of faith and life, and that forgiveness is lost when an act condemned in the Bible is no longer called a sin.

"One has to distinguish the promises from the law in order to recognize the benefits of Christ" (149.184). [All pages references are from The Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert edition.] "All Scripture should be divided into these two main topics: the law and the promises. In some places it communicates the law. In other places it communicates the promise according to Christ, either when it promises that Christ will come and on account of him offers the forgiveness of sins, justification and eternal life, or when in the Gospel itself, Christ, after he appeared, promises the forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life. Now when we refer to the 'law' in this discussion we mean the commandments of the Decalogue, wherever they appear in the Scriptures. For the present we will say nothing about the ceremonial and civil laws of Moses" (121.5-6),

The distinguishing of law and promise is totally obscured when people say that Scripture must be obeyed, upheld, or is the norm of faith and life. When law and promise are obscured, law and promise are lost. The law is changed from accusing and

damning into a weak description of how to please God and so be right to God and not really need Christ as a mediator. The promise is changed from being good news into a guilt-based reason to obey the law, as in, "Jesus died to take away your mistakes and so you should behave." To console consciences that they are doing what is right because the Bible says so is to console consciences with the law and so teach works righteousness, which takes away faith in Christ. So any time anyone says that Scripture should be upheld or is the source of faith and life and should be obeyed, that is to be totally dismissed at once because it does not distinguish law and promise, and because it is not based on Christ, and because it offers no comfort to consciences.

Some say the law is the immutable will of God. The law is indeed immutable in that the law will always do the three tasks described earlier: preserve, criticize, and execute. The law is immutable in that the civil use of the law will always be needed to restrain evildoers. The Third Use of the Law as a guide to the Christian life, however, does not maintain the immutability of the law but mutates the law into a way to earn God's pleasure. It mutes the law's accusation, condemnation, and wrath-bringing qualities. If the law is immutable, then The Third Use of the Law as a guide for Christian ethics goes against the genuine immutability of the Law.

Christ has not mutated the law, but has put an end to it, fulfilled it, and completed it. Christ has overcome what the law does. The law kills but Christ makes alive. The law condemns but Christ forgives. The law accuses but Christ gives his peace to all people. So, when someone is in Christ, the law has no power. In Christ the law cannot rule. In Christ the law has no effect. Either Christ rules the Christian's conscience or the law does. There is not room for both in the same bed, as Luther says in his commentary on Galatians. In the Christian,

it is Christ who rules.

When people say that the Gospel is lost because sin is no longer being called sin and repentance is thus no longer needed, they are using a weak understanding of sin, namely that sin is not fulfilling civil righteousness. However, that is to “consider only the commandments of the second table, which entail the civil righteousness that reason understands. Being content with this they suppose that they satisfy the law of God. Meanwhile they fail to notice the first table which instructs us to love God, to conclude that God is angry with sin, truly to fear God, truly to conclude that God hears our prayers” (125.34). “But the opponents attribute righteousness [pleasing God] to love for this reason: they teach the law and think that righteousness is obedience to the law. For human reason only focuses on the law and does not understand any other righteousness except obedience to the law. But Paul protests loudly and teaches that righteousness is something different, namely, obedience to the promise of reconciliation given on account of Christ, that is, the reception of mercy given on account of Christ. For we are acceptable to God and our consciences find peace this way: when we sense that God is gracious to us on account of Christ. Therefore godly minds must be called back from the law to the promise” (154f.229). “For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Romans 10.3-4). God’s righteousness is defined earlier in Romans, “But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Romans 3.21-26).

The Third Use of the Law is mistakenly taught because reason does not understand any other righteousness or any other way to

please God except obedience to the law. But Christian faith and Christian ethics is obedience to the Promise of Christ! Thus, The Third Use of the Law completely by-passes faith in Christ. A lack of faith in Christ making our actions acceptable to God is why The Third Use of the Law is insisted upon. Our actions are acceptable to God, right to God, pleasing to God, only by faith. To say that Christians know their action is right or wrong to God on the basis of the law (The Third Use of the Law) is to trust the law for how we live right to God or how we please God or how God accepts what we do. The law is thus trusted instead of Christ. Christ is not given his glory. The promise is ignored, not "used," and rendered use-less. Faith is not taught. To say that our actions are right because they are in accordance with the law (The Third Use of the Law) is to abandon Christ and the teaching of faith. "By following [the teaching of The Third Use of the Law, people] fail to see that they thereby abolish the entire promise of the free forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ" (140.121). And faith is what God regards and reckons as righteousness.

If Christians insist that one law should be kept, then they must keep all the laws. Choose but one law that must be obeyed and the system of the law has been chosen as the way to relate to God. To relate to God through the law is to see God as a God who only accuses, judges, condemns, and kills. "If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ" (Galatians 5.2-5). To insist that one law be kept gives no comfort to the conscience, since the law with its accusations and condemnation and killing is now the way a person relates to God. And nothing angers a conscience more than the first law that God is to be loved more than anything

else. For no one keeps that law.

The Third Use of the Law is used to falsely assure Christians that what they do is right to God. For when The Third Use of the Law is taught, "They completely bury Christ by imagining that we have access to God [please God] through our own works, and through them merit this disposition and then by this love find peace of conscience. Does this not completely bury Christ and do away with the entire teaching of faith?" (133f.81) So, to assure someone that what they do is pleasing to God because they are keeping the law is to bury Christ and to take away faith, the very thing God reckons as righteousness because it is faith in Christ who died and rose for us. "If moral works merited the forgiveness of sins and justification [pleased God], there would be no need for Christ" (135.87). "Whoever thinks that receiving the forgiveness of sins [pleasing God] is a consequence of acts of love insults Christ and will discover in the judgment of God that such faith in one's own righteousness [way of pleasing God] is wicked and futile" (143.150). "Now if we overcome the wrath of God by our love, if we merit the forgiveness of sins before God by our love, if we are acceptable by our observance of the law, let the opponents destroy the promise of Christ. Let them abolish the Gospel that teaches that we have access to God through Christ, the propitiator, and that we are accepted not on account of our fulfilling the law but on account of Christ" (153.223).

Some may say that Christ has removed the curse of the law so that the law no longer accuses, condemns, or brings God's wrath. Instead, the law is now only a guide. But the very nature of law is to accuse. For wherever there is a law, that law measures behavior, judging whether a person's actions meet the standard the law has set. The law will always say either "Yes" or "No" to what a person does. The only way the law's judgment can be taken away is to take away law itself. And for

the sake of comforting consciences, Christ has taken away the law by his death and resurrection.

Some may object that The Third Use of the Law is not about earning righteousness, but about pleasing God, about living the life God wants Christians to live. It may be objected that pleasing God by keeping the law through faith is different from earning righteousness through works of the law. Those objecting will say that trying to please God is what the life of faith is, that it is a way to give God thanks for what Christ has done, or that it is a response to the Gospel. But to say that thanks is given by good works or by pleasing God is to forget the teaching of faith. Faith and faith alone is how God is pleased. Faith alone is how God is given thanks for the Gospel. That is how thanks is based on Christ, which is what is needed according to the first question of the test for what is Christian.

People cannot become Christ-trusters through their own abilities. "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel" (355.6). Instead, a person is called to faith by hearing that Christ died for them and that for Christ's sake they receive forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life. Then the person lives that faith by being merciful to others with Christ's mercy, forgiving others with Christ's forgiveness, loving others with Christ's love, and serving their neighbor with Christ's goodness. The law has no categories at all for such "Christ-talk."

The attitude of The Third Use of the Law is, "Look at me, God, I am doing this to please you. I am keeping your law. I am doing what is right. Aren't I a good and faithful follower of Jesus?" But such a person is not following Jesus and instead

trusts the law as the way to live the way God wants them to. Such a person is looking to the law for comfort and assurance that what they do is right to God. However, the way of the law is criticism and execution. Thus, "good works do not bring peace to the conscience" (170.358). When people look to the law for God's approval and affection, they do not realize the law is working to criticize and execute them. And they do not believe that Christ can give them God's love. They boast of their works and not of Christ. So law is getting the glory and not Christ. Did the law die for people? Does the law reconcile people with God? No, but Christ has.

What is the difference between an unbeliever doing a work of love and a Christian doing that same act of love? Both can do the same act of love because civil righteousness is attainable by reason. People do live very upright, honest, caring, neighborly, self-sacrificing lives without faith in Christ. The Third Use of the Law cannot differentiate between the act of love of an unbeliever and the act of love of a Christian. Do both please God because they do an act of love? If yes, Christ is forgotten. The unbeliever's work of love does not please God because only faith in Christ pleases God. So also the Christian's act of love is pleasing to God only because of faith in Christ.

Civil law will still be used by the Christian because they continue to live in the "old" creation. Civil law will still be used to organize, give directions, order society, regulate, teach, learn, govern, penalize, and so on. All such civil law preserves and protects people so that God's creation does not disintegrate and also so that the Gospel can be proclaimed without interruption. There are many different types of government, all serving God's purpose of the civil law-to preserve and protect people. Some governments use the penalty of capital punishment and others do not. Some countries have

national health care and others do not. There are different ways of teaching or for providing education. Governments also use the law of preservation and protection in the arena of sexuality in different ways.

In one culture (Madagascar), the man will not marry a woman until she has borne a child, proving her fertility. The child is given to the grandparents as their old age insurance when the woman marries. Old age insurance in the United States is Medicare paying eighty-seven percent of nursing home care. One culture will have the widow marry the chief so that she belongs to a household and is included in the distribution of food. The ancient Israelites had the widow marry the younger brother, even if he was already married. All are God's ways of preserving and protecting. The Netherlands allows same-gender marriages. But never, never are the specific rules of civil law to be changed into The Third Use of The Law, into a way to earn righteousness or a way to please God. Actually, the law was never meant to be a way to please God. God uses the law to preserve and protect for the sake of the Gospel; and to accuse people of unfaith, to increase sin, and to put to death. To turn the law into a way to please God, as in The Third Use of the Law, uses the law in a way God did not intend it to be used, as was earlier said by Paul, when he spoke of the law being the disciplinarian until Christ came.

Since the civil use of the law restrains evildoers, governs, teaches, and penalizes, when the situation in the world changes, such as greater wealth, new technologies, new countries, then the civil law is amended to govern the changes. An example is how civil law has changed to give all people the right to vote. An example of church civil law changing is the allowing of pastors to marry and women to be pastors. Civil law is changing because sexual lifestyles have changed. In New York State, if a couple has lived together, had children, and then

separate, the court makes child custody decisions and the division of property divisions as if the couple had been married. That has helped preserve and protect those couples and their children. In many cultures sexual relations are governed because of inheritance of property and money, and because of responsibility for offspring. Birth control has taken away the risk of responsibility for offspring and so has caused changed sexual relations. Inheritance laws and laws about the division of marital property at divorce have changed.

Those civil matters are still God's civil matters. God is concerned, in the civil arena, to preserve and protect people so that creation and people survive, and also so that the Gospel can be proclaimed to them. Civil law is not about stating that one behavior is right to God and another behavior is wrong to God. For there is no righteousness to God through the law. Civil law is about preserving and protecting people.

In all these changes, The Second Use of the Gospel would uphold the law to do its work of preservation and protection. The Second Use of the Gospel also gives Christians the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ, the love of Christ, the fruits of the Spirit. These gifts, found nowhere in God's law, guide the Christian in the life of faith in Christ in the midst of all those changes. As a guide, The Second Use of the Gospel uses faith working through love to care for the neighbor. In opposition, the law, even The Third Use of the Law, gives accusation, condemnation, and death. For the glory of Christ and the comfort of our consciences, the Second Use of the Gospel is the only guide a Christian can have and gets to have.

CROSSINGS

When Christ's good news is proclaimed, the hearers' needs are two. The first is to have their situation in life explained or

diagnosed so that they can see the law working in their lives, how the law exposes their lack of faith in God and how God criticizes and executes them. The second need is to be told that Christ died and rose for them as the way God is pleased with them; and then to be called to faith in Christ as their righteousness before God, who gives them forgiveness and eternal life. By that faith in Christ they can then bring the forgiveness, love, mercy, peace, and reconciliation of Christ to their situation in life.

When Christ's messengers proclaim Christ's good news to people gathered to hear Christ's good news for them, the Crossings' process of Diagnosis/Prognosis is a way to proclaim Christ. The Diagnosis is about the hearer's first need. The Prognosis is about the second need. Each need is broken up into three steps, for a total of six. The six steps of the Crossings' Diagnosis/Prognosis are:

Diagnosis:

Step One: The External Problem: the situation being addressed in daily life in the world;

Step Two: The Internal Problem: the cause of the situation is diagnosed to be a lack of faith or misplaced faith;

Step Three: The Eternal Problem: God is against those who lack faith and terminates them.

Prognosis:

Step Four: The Eternal Solution: the death and rising of Christ to overcome God's accusation, judgment, and wrath;

Step Five: The Internal Solution: the giving of faith in Christ, the giving of the Holy Spirit;

Step Six: The External Solution: using Christ's benefits, such as the Spirit, the mind of Christ, the fruits of the Spirit, the lordship of Christ, the love of Christ, to address the initial situation of Step One-daily life out in the world.

The Crossings' process starts with the law to help the hearers see how the law is working in their lives and that they need Christ. Then Christ is given. Then the benefits of Christ (The Second Use of the Gospel) are given and used as the new way to live in Christ. The distinction of law and Gospel is maintained in this way so that the benefits of Christ-faith-can be given and used. Also, since there are different maladies (guilt, death, sickness, despair, ignorance of God, being angry at God, placing confidence in temporal things, etc.), the specific malady is diagnosed so that the proper prognosis can treat that malady.

The Crossings' process uses the law fully. Step One is the civil use and the accusation use of the law. Step Two is the more full accusation of unfaith. Step Three is judgment, condemnation, and God's wrath (death for the unbeliever). The law is also upheld in its proper place, that is, in the life of the person without faith in Christ. Step Four is Christ given as Good News that overcomes Step Three's bad news of God's wrath. The first "use" of that Good News is Step Five, which is faith in Christ which replaces Step Two's bad news of unfaith. The second "use" of that Good News is Step Six, to use faith in life and ethics for the problem or bad news of Step One.

Once Christ is given, the law does not dare trespass into Christ's realm, into the new creation, into the new life, into the life of the resurrection, and the life of faith. Proclaimers of Christ must not bring the law into the life of faith where Christ rules with his righteousness. To bring the law into Christ's realm is disbelief and unfaith and takes away the glory only Christ is owed. To bring the law into Christ's realm, which is what happens when The Third Use of the Law is used for Christian ethics, only troubles consciences because the law, by its very nature, accuses and condemns. Thus consciences are deprived of the comfort Christ gives, namely,

faith in a God of mercy through Christ.

The Second Use of the Gospel, because it is Gospel, gives life, uplifts, regenerates, and “We begin to love our neighbor because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses” (140.125). The Third Use of the Law inspires no new impulses. It is dead. So let Christians live by faith in Christ, in the mind of Christ, by the love of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and with the fruits of the Spirit. That way, neighbors are loved, consciences are comforted, and Christ is trusted and glorified, for he is the one who died and rose for us.

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The Second Use of the Gospel in Lutheran Reformation Theology – Part I

Colleagues,

This week's ThTh posting, and next week's as well, are a two-part essay by Timothy J. Hoyer, Pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Lakewood, New York. Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

THE SECOND USE OF THE GOSPEL – IN LUTHERAN REFORMATION THEOLOGY

By Timothy J. Hoyer

Witnesses testify that the man they knew as Jesus of Nazareth was the son of God and that he died on a cross and was raised from the dead, in order that those who believe that he suffered for them and that for his sake they are forgiven by God, made righteous by God, and given eternal life by God, actually do receive forgiveness, are righteous, and have eternal life. For God regards and reckons that faith in Christ as righteousness (Augsburg Confession, Article 4).

To ensure that all teaching of Christ proclaims that good news, two questions are asked of all that is taught. The first question is: Does it “use” the merits and benefits of the death and rising of Christ? The second question is: Does it “use” them to comfort consciences (give the benefits of Christ to those who need them)? Christians teach “in order to proclaim the glory of Christ and to present firm consolation to consciences” (172). (All page references are from The Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert edition.) All that is taught as Christian must answer those two questions positively in order for it to be Gospel. Why? For it is Christ who died and rose for all people. And his purpose for doing so was to give all people faith and peace with God. “But these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20.31). “Only that which brings peace to consciences justifies before God” (146.179). Thus, when Christians discuss how they can best proclaim Christ, they help each other make sure that their teaching glorifies Christ by using him and thereby comforts consciences.

There is debate about how to proclaim Christ when teaching Christians how they are guided in their new life of faith. This is the topic called Christian ethics. How do Christians live a life pleasing to God? How do Christians know what is the right action before God that they should do?

The most widespread teaching of Christian ethics is called –in Lutheran confessional language–“The Third Use of the Law.” It is to use God’s law to guide the Christian. Notice again the importance of the word “use.” [For the first and second uses of the law, see below.]

However, the Lutheran Reformers claimed that the Gospel was to be used both for salvation and for Christian ethics. Using the Gospel for ethics can thus be called “The Second Use of the Gospel.” Which use-the Third Use of the Law or the Second Use of the Gospel-proclaims Christ and comforts consciences? I will seek to show how the Gospel is used to guide the Christian, and thereby expose The Third Use of the Law as a widely-sown weed in the field of Christian ethics.

When choosing between The Second Use of the Gospel and the Third Use of the Law, “We are not engaging in a mere war over words. We are arguing about an important matter. From where should godly minds receive a sure hope of salvation? Are good works able to bring peace to consciences? Should they hold that eternal life takes place when good works are set over against the judgment of God? Or, on the contrary, should they uphold that on account of Christ through mercy they are regarded as righteous and consequently obtain eternal life? These things arise in a controversy such that, unless a conscience sorts this out, it cannot have firm and certain consolation” (170.358).

How do Christians know that what they do is right to God? How

do they know that their action is pleasing to God?

Too often people will answer those questions with the law, that is, without using Christ. Some will say that an action is wrong to God because Scripture says so. Christians are not to go against Scripture. They will say Scripture must be obeyed because Scripture is the word of God. Scripture is the source and norm of a Christian's faith and life. The law is the immutable will of God and so must be obeyed especially by Christians. Christian teaching on moral issues has the authority of having been around two thousand years. To be Christian one must do what the Bible says. And they will say that to change any law that's in the Bible is to go against the Gospel because it denies that the action the law prohibits is a sin and so takes away the need for repentance and the need for Christ.

They will say that because Christians are sinner and saint at the same time, the Third Use of the Law is needed to guide the Christian in the life God wants Christians to live or else people will do whatever they want to do.

The Second Use of the Gospel gives the Christian the new benefits of Christ as the Christian's guide in the new life of faith. The new benefits of Christ are the indwelling of Christ, the mind of Christ, the Spirit of Christ, the love of Christ given to Christians to give to others, and the fruits of the Spirit.

The Gospel bases the definition of sin, of what is not pleasing or what is wrong to God, as not having faith in Christ (John 16.8-11). "For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Romans 14.23). Sin means "that from birth they are full of evil desires and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God" (38.1).

Sin cannot be defined only as the breaking of commandments, for then the fear of God and faith in Christ are lost. "They fail to mention the more serious defects of human nature like being ignorant of God, despising God, lacking fear and confidence in God, hating the judgment of God, fleeing this judging God, being angry with God, despairing of his grace, and placing confidence in temporal things" (113.8). The Third Use of the Law does "not even notice these maladies, which are completely opposed to the law of God" (113.8). If sin is only the breaking of the commandments, then all that is needed to please God and gain eternal life is civil righteousness. But that leaves Christ out and so does not positively answer the first test question.

The need for civil righteousness is too often the deepest diagnosis of the problem, for human reason thinks civil righteousness is all that is needed to please God. However, that leads people to think that as long as the law is mostly kept then a person is right with God and pleasing to God. The need for Christ is lost. People also think that the law may be broken once in a while but we trust Jesus to pay for that mistake and then help us keep the law. Never is the law seen as accusing us and condemning us and killing us. Rather, the law is used as a guide by everyone and those who trust Jesus get a little extra help keeping the law in order to please God, do what is right, and so get to heaven. Jesus is thus no longer the mediator between God and us. Jesus is made into the reason people should live according to the law of God, which is the life pleasing to God. But that makes the promise null and void, the teaching of faith is lost, and consciences are constantly troubled by the fact that they keep making mistakes. God is seen as always loving, never condemning, and God helps people to do better and helps people see death as natural and that all people go to heaven as long as they were good enough because

God loves everybody. Thus, without Jesus as the mediator between God and us, the Third Use of the Law is needed to guide us to live right.

The Gospel defines the law very strongly as all that is not based on Christ and does not give comfort to consciences. "And when the Advocate comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment; about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned" John 16.8-11). Judgment is the law. According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the law is what demands certain behavior and attitudes of the heart from people. "But the Decalogue requires not only outward civil works that reason can produce to some extent; it also requires other works that are placed far beyond the reach of reason, such as, truly to fear God, truly to love God, truly to call upon God, truly to be convinced that he hears us, and to expect help from God in death and all afflictions. Finally, it requires obedience to God in death and all afflictions so that we do not flee or avoid these things when God imposes them" (121.8).

The First Use of the Law is that "God wants those who live according to the flesh to be restrained by such civil discipline, and to preserve it he has given laws, learning, teaching, governments, and penalties" (124.22). The Second Use of the Law is that "the law always accuses and terrifies consciences. Therefore the law does not justify [please God] since the conscience that is terrified by the law flees the judgment of God" (126.38). The properly identified "Third" Use of the Law in Lutheran confessional theology is to bring God's wrath. "Sin even now damns and brings eternal death to those who are not born again through baptism and the Holy Spirit" (39.2). "The law brings wrath" (Romans 4.15). Thus, this Third

Use is not law as a moral guide for the Christian life. It is the third, final, and lethal event of life under the law. In the law's first use it preserves and restrains; in the second it accuses; in the third it executes.

Thus, "because people cannot by their own powers live according to the law of God and because all are under sin and guilty of eternal wrath and death, we cannot be set free from sin and be justified through the law. Instead, what has been given to us is the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification on account of Christ, who was given for us in order to make satisfaction for the sins of the world, and who has been appointed as the mediator and propitiator" (126.40). "The promise freely offers to us, who are oppressed by sin and death, reconciliation on account of Christ, which is received not by works, but by faith alone. This faith does not bring to God trust in our own merits, but only trust in the promise or the mercy promised in Christ" (127.44). "Therefore it follows that personal faith-by which an individual believes that their sins are remitted on account of Christ and that God is reconciled and gracious on account of Christ-receives the forgiveness of sins and justifies us" (127.45). Christians now live according to faith in Christ, which is not the keeping of the commandments, but to "love God, truly to fear God, truly to assert that God hears prayer, to obey God in all afflictions, and to mortify concupiscence, etc. Thus because faith, which freely receives the forgiveness of sins, sets against the wrath of God Christ as the mediator and propitiator, it does not offer up our merits or our love. This faith is the true knowledge of Christ; it uses the benefits of Christ, it renews hearts, and it precedes our fulfillment of the law" (127.45-56).

The Gospel makes what Christians do acceptable and right to God only because of their faith in Christ. The basis of the

acceptability of what Christians do by faith in Christ is Christ. That is a real comfort to consciences because they now trust Christ to make what they do right to God. God will accept what Christians do as right for the sake of Christ because God raised Christ from the dead. Consciences are no longer troubled by the anxiousness of whether what is done is right or wrong to God, as do debates about what is right according to the Law. "Nor can godly minds be fortified against despair unless they think that through mercy on account of Christ and not on account of the law they with certainty have both righteousness and eternal life. This conviction consoles, uplifts, and saves godly minds. Therefore when our adversaries speak about condign merit, they cast aside the teaching about faith and the mediator Christ and drive consciences to despair" (166-167). "Therefore the fulfillment of the law is not accepted on its own account but on account of faith" (145.259). "Good works do not bring peace to the conscience" (170.358). "It is necessary to maintain that faith justifies [pleases God]. For how will Christ be the mediator if we do not use him as a mediator in justification [pleasing God] and if we do not realize that on his account we are regarded as righteous?" (131.69) "The forgiveness of sin [pleasing God] is something promised on account of Christ. Therefore it cannot be received in any other way than by faith alone, since a promise cannot be received in any other way than by faith alone" (134.84). "By faith alone we receive the benefits of Christ" (139.118). One of those benefits is pleasing God.

The Gospel of Christ frees Christians to "Live by the Spirit" (Galatians 5.16). This is The Second Use of the Gospel. Now, instead of the law restraining people, the Spirit restrains the sinner, which St. Paul called the flesh. "For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other,

to prevent you from doing what you want" (Galatians 5.17). The Holy Spirit is now what restrains the sinner from doing whatever is wanted.

Faith in Christ frees us from the law in all its uses, even the false use called The Third Use of the Law, which is the law as a guide for the Christian life. "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law" (Galatians 5.18). "My point is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance [pleasing God] comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise" (Galatians 3.17-18). That is how Paul bases his teaching on using the glory of Christ, answering positively the first question used to test all Christian teaching.

Faith in Christ frees us from the law in all its uses. "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Galatians 3.23-26). Christians no longer look to the law to hold their hand and guide them. Christians follow Jesus. Jesus also lived by faith. Examples of Jesus living by faith instead of by the law are in all the Gospels.

Some examples are: Jesus heals on the Sabbath even though it was against the law (Luke 6.6-11). Jesus forgives sin, which is against the law. "After all, the law does not teach the free forgiveness of sins" (131.70). Jesus forgave the paralytic, whom friends let down through the roof (Luke 5.17). Jesus broke the law when he touched a leper and healed him (Luke 5.12-16). His example of living by faith is best illustrated by a woman in the city, who was a sinner. She bathed Jesus' feet with her

tears, dried them with her hair, kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment. Jesus tells Simon the Pharisee that the woman did all that because she loved him a lot because she had been forgiven. “‘Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’ Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ And Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace’” (Luke 7.36-50). The woman’s actions were pleasing to Jesus, not because they were according to the law, which they weren’t, but because they were done by faith working through love. She needed no law to tell her what to do to please God, that is Jesus. She was guided by the love of Christ.

The Second Use of the Gospel uses the fruits of the Spirit to support the Christian’s life of faith. When working in love to care for the neighbor, the best fruits to have are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, truthfulness, and self-control. Against such, and for them, there is no law (Galatians 5.22-23).

The Second Use of the Gospel uses the mind of Christ to guide the life of the Christian. The good works that follow faith are to “truly fear God, truly to love God, truly to call upon God, truly to be convinced that God hears us, and to expect help from God in death and all afflictions...and obedience to God in death and all afflictions so that we do not flee or avoid these things when God imposes them” (121.8). Christ exemplified such good works in his death on the cross.

The Second Use of the Gospel has Christians guided by Christ’s new commandment that Christians love with the love Christ gives them. A Christian does not ask, “Is my act according to The

Third Use of the Law?" A Christian is called to make people good to God through faith in Christ. So a Christian asks, "How can I give Christ's mercy and forgiveness to this person in this situation? How can I give Christ's goodness and benefits to this person? What do I do at this moment to care, serve, and support my neighbors so they see that Christ's mercy and forgiveness is for them?" Then the Christian trusts that for Christ's sake their way of giving Christ's mercy and serving their neighbor is acceptable to God for Christ's sake. Remember, the Spirit restrains the Christian from doing whatever they want.

The Second Use of the Gospel uses good works, not to please God, but to be a sign to the Christian of the Gospel and be a means to show others the mercy of Christ for them. "Indeed, our forgiving is not a good work, except when it is done by those already reconciled. Accordingly, our forgiving, which indeed pleases God, follows divine forgiveness. However, Christ normally connects law and Gospel in this way so that he might convey both the teaching of faith and that of good works; so that we might also have many external signs of the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins, which remind and console us; and that we might be able to exercise faith in a variety of ways" (162).

Now the two questions used to test all Christian teaching will be applied to what "some say," as was listed earlier.

[Second and final section to come in next week's posting.]

God's Kingdom, God's Regime-change—some responses

[Preliminary note: The Manipur Mission Fleece, put out last month on the 7th anniversary of ThTh postings, subsequently augmented by our children's note to you on the occasion of our 50th wedding anniversary, has gathered \$18K of mission moisture. We are grateful.]

Colleagues,

Here are some responses to ThTh 369 & 370, the Book Review of CONSTANTS IN CONTEXTS, with its claim that “Kingdom of God” in the NT is God's regime-change with sinners (in Christ alone)—and not to be confused —literally, “fused together”—with all the generic good stuff God does (via a multitude of left-hand agents) throughout the world 24/7. To wit, the difference between the forgiveness of sins and daily bread. Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

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1. I'm with the chaplain [in ThTh 369 “people come to me seeking to be forgiven”]. All day long I deal as a [hospital] chaplain with people who want their sins forgiven. I understand that because I also want my sins forgiven. Christ takes us to him when he forgives us—he does that and we know it. There's nothing to sell, and there's nothing to fix—it is Christ's work, and we are his hands, is all. That's what brought me to him in faith, securely and forever. It's the sum of everything we yearn

for. I think it was Emerson that once said that human beings have the habit of wanting to categorize everything down to the tiniest detail. We got, in your words, the sweetest swap there is in all creation. Why must we complicate everything?

2. This was a long, hard read but well worth the trouble. As always, you slap down the words that give shape to the swirling uneasiness I feel when reading these kinds of books. Peace and justice are nothing compared to the startling sacrifice and forgiveness that God really offers. If peace and justice are all we can offer fellow sinners, it is literally damnation. Thanks again for holding the fort!
3. What we all have in common is a problem with the rosy scales of cultural optimism diminishing our understanding of our parlous state, indeed, of our standing in opposition to God as sinners until God's grace convicts of sin. I suspect, too, that we need a much better catechesis to help people see that this is our situation until we truly accept God's forgiveness.
4. [With this respondent I'll include some of my own response to him. My words come in CAPS, not because they are more important, but to demark them from his.] I wanted to make a comment about the "Constants in Context" reviews, which strike me as a solid critique and quite persuasive. I agree with the position you take with one misgiving, namely, that historically the two-kingdoms teaching has been badly misused and has contributed to quietism within Lutheran churches.

I DON'T THINK THAT IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN SHAPING SO-CALLED LUTHERAN "QUIETISM." SURELY NOT IN THE USA. AND AMONG LUTHERANS ON THE CONTINENT THAT IS NOT SEEN AS A MAJOR FACTOR. IN MY OWN LIFE AS A USA-LUTHERAN I NEVER WAS TAUGHT ANYTHING ABOUT "2 KINGDOMS" IN 8 YEARS OF PAROCHIAL

SCHOOL OR MY CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTION. NEVER HEARD ABOUT IT UNTIL I GOT TO THE SEMINARY. SO I CANNOT SEE WHERE 2K "TEACHING" WAS A FACTOR AT ALL. BUT MAYBE THAT'S JUST MY SHELTERED LIFE "IN MISSOURI."

I THINK USA LUTHERANS STAYED OUT OF POLITICAL LIFE MOSTLY BECAUSE OF THEIR LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC INSULARISM. THEY LIVED LARGELY AS EUROPEAN CULTURAL COLONIES WITHIN THE USA. THAT WAS TRUE OF MY LUTHERAN UPBRINGING. THE "REFORMED," MANY WHO SPOKE ENGLISH WHEN THEY GOT OFF THE BOAT, AND WERE THE ONES WHO WERE COMMITTED TO MAKING AMERICA "THEIR" NEW PROMISED LAND OF THE COVENANT (CALVINIST STYLE), THEY WERE THE ONES WHO WERE NON-COLONIAL "NORMAL" AMERICANS AND THUS NATURALLY THE ONES WHO WENT INTO PUBLIC LIFE WITH A (SOMETIMES) RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT TO MAKE AMERICA THE PROMISED LAND. ONCE U.S. CATHOLICS WERE "AMERICANIZED," THEY TOO ENTERED PUBLIC LIFE. MY DAD STILL TALKED GERMAN TO ME, HIS FIRSTBORN.

For a variety of reasons people tend to conclude that, Christianly speaking, the only kingdom that really matters is the kingdom of grace and the saving of souls; so the rest of life is thought of largely without reference to God.

THAT'S MORE THE FUNDAMENTALIST OPTION, I THINK. EVEN A DISTORTED 2-KINGDOM THEOLOGY STILL CALLED THE LEFT-HAND KINGDOM "GOD'S" TURF. IF WE LUTHERANS WENT THE FUNDAMENTALIST ROUTE, IT WAS NOT BECAUSE OF ANY 2K DOCTRINE (ABOUT WHICH, I MAINTAIN, THEY/WE KNEW BLESSED LITTLE. IS IT ANYWHERE IN THE LCMS CATECHISM THAT TRAINED US ALL? I DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING LIKE THAT, BUT I HAVEN'T CHECKED. IF IT REALLY IS THERE, WE MUST'VE SKIPPED IT IN OUR CATECHISM CLASSES.). INSTEAD IF LUTHERANS IN THE USA DID INDEED GO THAT ROUTE, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY (AT LEAST

SCANDINAVIAN AND GERMAN LUTHERANS—WITH EUROPEAN PIETISM IN THEIR VEINS ALREADY) FOUND THE FUNDAMENTALIST/EVANGELICALS TO BE “CLOSE” TO THEIR OWN (MIS-) PERCEIVED NOTIONS OF LUTHERAN PIETY.

And the rest of life is usually where our real commitments lie. You know all of this. It leads me to suspect that it may be more useful to talk about two aspects of God’s rule, or God’s two-fold rule, rather than two kingdoms. Not that doing so is a magic wand, but it might help us think more clearly about the way God’s reign encompasses all of life.

THAT’S WHY I OPTED FOR THE TERMS OF “REGIME” AND “REGIME-CHANGE.” THOSE TERMS FOCUS NOT ON THE TERRITORY —CHURCHY OR WORLDLY, SACRED OR SECULAR—BUT ON THE KIND OF OPERATION GOD IS UP TO. LEFT-HAND REGIME MAJORS IN FAIRNESS (AKA JUSTICE), RIGHT-HAND MAJORS IN FORGIVENESS. AT ROOT THESE ARE CLEAN CONTRARY. FAIRNESS = YOU GET WHAT YOU RIGHTLY HAVE COMING TO YOU; FORGIVENESS = YOU GET WHAT YOU DON’T DESERVE.

To be picky, in part two, p.7, under Summa, you say, “The agenda of peace, justice and integrity of creation is the stuff of the daily bread of human life; it is not the stuff of the KoG, God’s reconciling regime-change with sinners” etc. I agree with your intent here, to distinguish between God’s providence and God’s saving grace; but I think the entire Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of the kingdom.

THAT MIGHT BE MORE THAN PICKY. METHINKS WE DON’T SEE THINGS THE SAME HERE. MY CLAIM (EXEGETICAL CLAIM) IS THAT ALL N.T. REFERENCES TO “KINGDOM OF GOD” ARE REFERENCES TO WHAT GOD IS DOING IN CHRIST (AND NOWHERE ELSE). THAT IS,

RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF ETC. ALA 2 COR 5. TO SAY IT'S ALL "A PRAYER OF THE KINGDOM" IS TO BE SAYING WHAT SPECIFICALLY? LUTHER'S "CLEAR" DIFFERENCES IN "EXPLAINING" THE TWO PETITIONS (KINGDOM AND BREAD) MAKES ME THINK HE WOULD NOT SAY "IT'S ALL A PRAYER OF THE KINGDOM."

To say daily bread is not the stuff of the kingdom invites the dichotomy that plagues us.

I THINK IT'S WORSE THAN THAT.

WHAT PLAGUES THE CHURCHES TODAY (AS IN THE REFORMATION ERA) IS THAT THEY DO *NOT* MAKE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHAT GOD IS DOING IN CHRIST AND WHAT GOD IS DOING "PROVIDENTIALLY," AS YOU SAY, THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THAT SIGNALS THE VICTORY OF CALVINISM IN THE USA, WHERE GOD HAS JUST ONE REGIME. LUTHER FACED A MEDIEVAL CHURCH THAT ALSO HAD ONLY ONE "REGIME" OF GOD—AND IT WAS ALL GRACE.

NOT SO, HE SAID. THE SCRIPTURES ARE CLEAR ABOUT THIS. GOD HAS A REGIME OF LAW THAT IS NOT GRACE-FUL. IT'S FAIR, HOWEVER. IT PRESERVES THE FALLEN CREATION. IT'S FUNDAMENTAL AXIOM IS: YOU GET WHAT YOU'VE GOT COMING. AND GOD HAS THIS OTHER REGIME THAT REDEEMS CREATION—LITERALLY BRINGS IT BACK TO GOD'S OWNERSHIP—STARTING WITH HUMAN HEARTS—THE MOST ALIENATED SEGMENT OF THE ENTIRE OLD CREATION, THE ROOT OF CREATION'S "GROANING" ALA ROMANS 8.

TO MY LIGHTS THAT IS ONE WAY TO SEE WHAT IS AT THE CENTER OF THE LUTH. REFORMATION. MEDIEVAL ONE-REGIME-ISM, VS. REFORMATION TWO REGIMES. TO MAKE EVERYTHING GOD DOES = "GRACE"—SO SAID BONHOEFFER — IS TO WIND UP WITH CHEAP GRACE.

To enter the kingdom by grace and seek it first allows us (however imperfectly) not to worry about daily bread. And

trusting God for daily bread gives us freedom to seek first the kingdom. Both movements work in happy symbiosis, and both require trust, which is at the core of our relationship with God. Trust in God's grace and trust in God's providence are different, of course, but so intimately intertwined for the believer that they are rightly part of Jesus' kingdom prayer. Or so it seems to me.

"TRUSTING GOD FOR DAILY BREAD" IS INDEED LINKED TO GOD'S RIGHT-HAND REGIME. THE KEY WORD IS "TRUST." THAT COMES ONLY VIA GOD'S REGIME IN CHRIST. BUT GOD'S OPERATION TO GIVE "BREAD FOR THE WORLD" IS GOD'S LEFT-HAND REGIME IN ACTION, DISTINCT FROM THE REGIME THAT CHRIST BRINGS INTO THE WORLD. GOD'S BREAD-REGIME INTENDS TO FEED, NOURISH ALL, INCLUDING THE SINNERS (=ALL OF US)—EVEN APART FROM THEIR DISTRUST IN GOD. THE SECOND REGIME OF GOD IN CHRIST—AKA THE OFFER OF FORGIVENESS—GENERATES THE VERY TRUST THAT IS MISSING FROM THE BREAD REGIME. THAT SORT OF TRUST THE BREAD-REGIME CANNOT GENERATE. SO THE REGIMES *MUST* BE DIFFERENT. 'FACT IS, TRUST IS EVEN "UNNECESSARY" IN GOD'S BREAD REGIME, SINCE GOD GIVES DAILY BREAD TO ALL—EVEN TO THE DISTRUSTERS.

I would add that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of love and justice, which embraces the concerns of the fourth petition, even if, as you rightly assert, our efforts at love and justice do not get us into the kingdom.

ARE LOVE AND JUSTICE SYNONYMS? ON WHAT GROUNDS? ARE MERCY AND JUST DESERTS SYNONYMS? DON'T THINK SO. IF "JUSTICE" = THE DEATH OF SINNERS (WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH), THEN THE REGIME THAT JESUS BRINGS IS NOT JUSTICE. MERCY IS THE OPPOSITE OF JUSTICE. FORGIVENESS IS THE OPPOSITE OF FAIRNESS.

"JUSTICE" IS NOW A SHIBBOLETH IN SO MUCH THEOLOGICAL TALK, THAT LIKE GRACE IN BONHOEFFER'S DAY, IT IS "CHEAP." WHICH FINALLY MEANS MEANINGLESS. "JUSTICE" IS GOD'S LEFT-HAND OPERATION, THE REGIME THAT STANDS IN CONTRAST TO CHRIST'S – AS CRAZY OR AWFUL AS THAT MAY SOUND. WHEN PAUL NEVERTHELESS HAS THE CHUTZPAH TO CALL THE WORK OF CHRIST A "DIKAIOSYNE," A JUSTICE, HE KNOWS HE'S BLOWING PEOPLE'S MINDS—AND EXPLODING THE LINGUISTIC WINESKIN LABELLED "JUSTICE." CURRENT CHEAP TALK ABOUT "PEACE AND JUSTICE" AS GOD'S PROJECT HAS NO ANTENNA FOR THE "SCANDAL" OF THE (STRICTLY SPEAKING) "IN-JUSTICE" OF GOD FORGIVING SINNERS.

DICTIONARY-DEFINED JUSTICE IN ALL THE LANGUAGES I KNOW IS "SUUM CUIQUE" = GETTING WHAT YOU HAVE COMING TO YOU. TO GIVE SINNERS FORGIVENESS AND CALL THAT "JUSTICE" (DIKAIOSYNE) IS ONLY POSSIBLE IF YOU FOLLOW PAUL'S LABYRINTH ON THE "RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD" (E.G., IN ROMANS) IN ORDER TO GET TO SUCH A MIND-BLOWING, EVEN OFFENSIVE CLAIM. NO WONDER THE "JUSTICE-COMMITTED" (=TORAH-COMMITTED) JEWS WITH WHOM PAUL DEBATED IN ACTS AND HIS EPISTLES CALLED THIS SORT OF JUSTICE A SKANDALON. 'T WAS A MORAL ABOMINATION.

I'm probably not saying this well, but I'm too old to be embarrassed, so I would welcome your comments. Even more, your advice on how we might better persuade people that being saved by grace through faith means seeing the whole of life differently, through the lens of the kingdom, which launches us into works of love, and therefore such things as justice, peace, and the care of the earth.

I HAVE NO OTHER AGENDA THAN WHAT YOU HERE SAY SO WELL, IN ALL THESE THURSDAY THEOLOGY POSTINGS. MY MAJOR ANGLE, I THINK, IS THAT THE RADICAL MERCY/FAITH/PROMISE STUFF OF

GOD'S REGIME-CHANGE IN CHRIST HAS BECOME SO HO-HUM—REALLY SO CHRIST-LESS—"OF COURSE, GOD FORGIVES SINNERS. THAT'S HIS JOB." SO I KEEP POUNDING ON THAT. AT ROOT, IT IS THE BONHOEFFER AGENDA—FIGHTING CHEAP GRACE THAT IS SO PLANET-WIDE. AND HUSTLING THE RADICAL PROMISE-AND-FAITH JUSTICE/JUSTIFICATION SO THAT FOLKS TRUSTING THE REAL THING WILL BE LAUNCHED INTO THE STUFF YOU SPEAK OF IN YOUR LAST LINES ABOVE. CHEAP GRACE LAUNCHES NO ONE INTO ANYTHING EXCEPT ON-GOING INCURVATURE INTO SELF AND ONE'S OWN AGENDAS. CHEAP GRACE IS THE REASON LUTHERANS—OTHER CHRIST-CONFESSORS TOO—STAY UNLAUNCHED AND STILL GLUED TO THEIR EASY CHAIRS. THE ONLY THING CHEAP GRACE—AND CHEAP KINGDOM TALK—CAN PRODUCE IS COUCH-POTATOES. TO TELL THEM TO GET OFF THEIR BUTTS, WITHOUT DISLODGING THEIR ADDICTION TO CHEAP GRACE, IS A LOST CAUSE. ONLY CHRIST'S RADICAL REGIME-CHANGE WILL GET FOLKS OFF THEIR DUFFS AND LAUNCH THEM AS EQUALLY RADICAL SOUTHPAWS IN GOD'S OWN LEFT-HAND REGIME.

SO IT SEEMS TO ME.

5. [And finally this one, claiming that in my review I was not feisty enough!]Appreciated your willingness to hold accountable those "who have eyes but will not see." Your concluding statements...

- One of God's regimes is terminal. The other (hallelujah!) isn't. We have his word for it.
- KoG mission theology is grounded in the one that lasts.

...cannot be spoken enough in and to this world today. That being said, I wonder where is the outrage at those who propose such sweeping guidelines for the church and its mission as B & S do and are so wrong. . . . You seem entirely too calm about this, Ed. But perhaps you know that such outrage would not even begin to be heard these

days.

Caught in the Crosshairs: A Study of Psalm 2

Colleagues,

Cleaning up the files I came across this long-lost treasure from 3 years ago. It's Jerry Burce's signature crossing of folks like us back in 2002-though in one place he's updated a reference to 2005-with the diagnosis and prognosis of Psalm 2. Using texts from the Hebrew scriptures for Christian crossings takes extra work. You don't see OT-crossings often even on Crossings' own text study postings. In earlier days when Crossings offered semester-long courses, we did have a couple based on OT texts—from Isaiah and from the Psalms. So there is a tradition. As you will see, Jerry can do it—take an OT text and run it through the Crossings matrix. The trick is to necessitate Christ just as the original NT writers did when working from the Hebrew scriptures, the only Bible they had.

During a regular workweek Jerome Burce exercises his calling as pastor at Messiah Lutheran congregation in Fairview Park, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. For this Crossings from Psalm 2 Jerry was guest-worker at the “Sebring Seminar,” a regular gathering in Florida during the past decade engineered by Richard Lyon and coached by Bob Bertram, both now among the blessed departed.

We rejoice that Jerry is among the living and we know that you will rejoice too with what he gives us here.

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSHAIRS. A STUDY OF PSALM 2

[Preface to the 2002 Sebring Seminar. The overall theme for the seminar was Prov. 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." I picked it. I was toying at the time with ideas for a book on deus absconditus (God hidden). These were the months after 9/11 when no one was bothering to be as scared as we ought to be. We still aren't. –Jerry]

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS [to the Sebring Seminar participants in 2002]

- i. Our goals over these next twenty four hours are two: first, to explore and discuss the proverb that serves as our theme; second, to go home wiser than we were when we came.*
- ii. The first goal will entail the exercise of our minds. The second proposes an outcome in our hearts. Toward the first goal we will work. Toward the second let us pray.*
- iii. The theme presupposes our participation in a culture that is very smart but not very wise. It also assumes that we ourselves are prone to foolishness. One of our big jobs is to be as mutually honest about this as possible, bearing in mind that understatement is not the only form of dishonesty. So is exaggeration.*
- iv. We will want to keep in mind throughout our time together that "the fear of the Lord" is a sharper, more specific expression than "the fear of God." Wisdom, says the*

proverb, begins with fear not of any old god or of “godness” in general, but of that distinct and particular God who revealed his Word and will at Sinai and also—so the Church observes—in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Let us agree from the outset that when we say “God” we mean this God and not another.

- v. The fact that an ELCA pastor should feel obliged to make the previous observation is a good indicator of how fearless, and therefore foolish, the Church is getting, at least in its mainline quarters. It also underlines why the theme merits a seminar’s worth of attention.
- vi. St. Paul asserts that “God made [Christ Jesus] our wisdom” (1 Cor 1:30). By overlaying the proverb with this assertion we arrive at the ultimate goal of our time together. Our aim is to grasp—again, with mind and heart—how the fearsomeness of the Lord is the essential presupposition of Christ’s ministry, and also how the fear of the Lord is the essential precondition of faith in Christ. Our aim, in other words, is to “necessitate” Christ. God grant this outcome. Amen.
- vii. Finally: let us agree from the outset that whenever, as in the previous paragraph, we speak of Christ’s ministry, we are speaking primarily of his present ministry to us, among us, and through us, for the sake of the world. I assume it is truly said of all present that this folly (so say the Greeks) is consuming our lives. Like Paul we are fools for Christ. Why else would we be here? May the coming hours encourage us to keep wearing this label with joy.

PSALM 2

1. Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain [KJV“imagine a vain thing]?

2. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying,
3. "Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us."
4. He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision.
5. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying
6. "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill."
7. I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you.
8. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.
9. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."
10. Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.
11. Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling
12. kiss his feet, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (RSV)

SUMMARY

For people like us-thoughtful American Christians of AD 2002, deeply earnest, striving mightily to honor and serve God-Psalm 2 functions as a trap. God himself is the hunter who has cleverly laid it. He now waits for us to stumble into it. He will use it to expose the hypocrisy of our superficial reverence for him, and with it the folly of imagining that our pious feelings for him are enough to save us. Once he has us trapped, he will strangely yet graciously invite us to hang our hearts and hopes on Jesus his anointed (which means Christ).

THE SET-UP

1. For any American who has learned to read the Bible properly, Psalm 2 will quickly come across as an incredibly annoying little poem. One might go so far as to call it a Biblical embarrassment.
 1. In case you were wondering, Virginia, the scholars are quite correct. The Bible is not properly read until we've scraped away the gauzy filters and smoky sediments of pious Sunday School impressions, fixed and reinforced by a long and deep tradition of deceptive Christian art. "Read what's there," said Luther. The better exegetes of the past 150 years have been pushing us hard to do just that. Surprises abound when we do it. The Jacob of Genesis is not the fellow we saw in the Sunday School leaflets; and back then if anyone dared to tell us the truth about David, we were too young to get it. Later, when we grew up, too many of us struggled far too long with a second, ideological filter, a vague, uneasy impression of what we were supposed to be finding in a book called holy.
 2. Among things we were not supposed to find in such a book were passages that provoke our contempt. Many of us, encountering such passages, struggled mightily to keep our contempt firmly swallowed and tucked away from all views, our own included. To do otherwise, we believed, would be "to set ourselves against the Lord" and his inspired, inerrant Word.
 3. Trouble is, we believed correctly. More troubling still, God got-and gets-to read the thoughts of our hearts. But more on this below.
2. For now, let's be bold, blunt, and unabashed. Psalm 2, scrubbed and unfiltered, comes across as the chest-

thumping boast of an ancient Near Eastern would-be despot, and a petty one at that. (Remember that this is Israel we're talking about. It isn't Assyria.)

1. Why does it come across this way? -because that's what it is.
2. The scholars refer to this passage more sedately as a coronation psalm. It was doubtless composed and publicly sung on the occasion of someone's ascent to the throne of Israel. Chances are the someone was either David or Solomon. Neither emerges from the Biblical record as an especially attractive man, at least where A.D. 21st century Americans are concerned. (Given the choice of being ruled by Solomon or Sadaam Hussein, the right-minded among us would likely choose Sadaam.)
3. Reduced to playground terms, Psalm 2 reads as follows: "My god is bigger and badder than your god. So cough up your lunch money."
3. Let's back up to 1000 BC or thereabouts, whenever this psalm first saw the light of day. Let's assume that renditions of it made their way via spy or ambassador from the coronation festivities in Jerusalem to the courts of Moab and Ammon, Syria and Edom, perhaps even to Egypt and Mesopotamia. One can expect either of two likely outcomes: umbrage was taken or jokes were told, depending on the economic and military strength, relative to Israel, of the court in which the song was being replayed.
 1. By contrast, it exceeds all sensible credulity to imagine residents of those courts responding to the psalm by composing hymns of their own to Israel's god and quickly sending tribute to Israel's new king.
4. What we imagine of reactions to the psalm in 1000 BC

speaks volumes about the state of our own minds and hearts in 2002 AD. That is, we are certain our ancestors- this they are; we too are numbered among "the nations"- dismissed it derisively because we are certain we ourselves would do the same in their shoes. In other words, we find it exceptionally easy to cast our sympathies with Israel's neighbors. Correspondingly, we find it woefully difficult to think well of Israel's king. And when Israel's king invokes the Lord as the source of his bullying claims, some of us might well be quietly inclined to accuse him of religious backwardness, if not perversion.

- 1. Parenthetically: many thoughtful Americans would make this accusation freely and boldly. Secular pundits of both print and broadcast media do so as if by instinct whenever their attention is drawn to the fiercer passages of the Old Testament in particular. (Thus, for example, an NPR commentary in June, 2005 by a hitherto biblically illiterate Roman Catholic reacting to her first encounters with the text in a parish Bible study.) Come to think of it, are not America's opinion makers rightly numbered these days among "the rulers of the nations"?*
- 2. Again parenthetically: do we who belong to the nations not vastly prefer the spirit of Jonah 3 to the spirit of Psalm 2? But do we not also arrive at this preference by ignoring the fundamental harmony between psalmist and prophet? (Remember that Jonah's happy ending is predicated solely on the miraculous and otherwise unthinkable capitulation of Nineveh to the terms laid out in the psalm.)*
- 5. Comes the problem. This aggressive rant of a wretched little king is presented to us as the Word of our God, to*

be heard, honored, believed, and obeyed-by us. This happens by the simple virtue of its inclusion in the Scriptural canon, and by the greater virtue of its frequent citation (whether directly or indirectly) by New Testament writers (Mt 3:17, Ac 13:33, He 1:5, 5:5, 2 Pe 1:17, Re 2:26-7, 12:5, 19:15) who use it to interpret the work and person of Christ. This identification-nasty little psalm; Word of God-is the snare that awaits us.

6. Beware. God is about to use this snare to “cross us up.”

STEP 1. “Let us burst their bonds asunder...” (External Problem)

7. Who of us fears God-really? Do we not prefer to like him? When we so rightly teach our children that “God is love” do we not also invite them-accidentally perhaps; without ill intent, certainly, but also quite wrongly-to imagine that God is by nature warm, affirming, and eminently likeable? Do we not ache for others to like God as we do? Is this ache not responsible, at least in some measure, for the current pressure to turn our churches into homes on the suburban range “where never is heard a discouraging word”? Where the skies are forever clear of clouds, not only the lesser clouds of frowning parishioner and difficult liturgy but also-especially-those fierce clouds of expectation and judgment that loomed at Sinai?

8. In such a context we instinctively rebel against Words of God like Psalm 2. The “vain thing” we have come to imagine about God excludes the possibility that God might be inclined to “dash them in pieces” and “break them with a rod of iron,” whoever “them” might be. Because of this we take counsel together-exegetes, parish pastors, and ordinary Christian sinners of all kinds (cohabiting twenty something; lap-of-luxury fifty something; world-weary eighty something)-to cast off the yoke of the

psalm's unpleasantness. Academics, deconstructing the psalm, agree to make like Marcion and strike it from the canon (it is merely David's word; it can't be God's word). Pastors, encountering the psalm on their triennial tour of the lectionary, choose deliberately not to preach it. As for layfolk, they simply ignore it. Come to think of it, what better, more effective way is there of dethroning the psalm? Of stripping it of its royal status as Word of God? Of challenging its claim on us?

9. Vanity of vanities: most of us dare to imagine that we are honoring God when we do this. It makes it easier for us to like him. It will make him more pleasing and attractive, we feel, to others. The more others like him as we do, the farther his reign is advanced. Or so we intuit.

STEP 2: "The kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and his anointed..." (Internal Problem)

10. Deeper things are afoot, however. Think idolatry. Think deicide.
11. Why are we so intent on liking God? Is it not because we think God likes us the way God jolly well ought to? This, of course, is the standard fantasy of "the kings of the earth," the very thing we Americans presently are. As students of the American character consistently point out, Americans from the Plymouth Rock beginning have thought of themselves as favored people. More so than most royals, we also imagine ourselves to be likeable, to the point that we are stunned and aggrieved when the other-world peasantry gets surly and refuses to like us. Of course, the only god suitable for likeable people is a likeable god who really likes them. No wonder Jesus is primarily our pal these days. No wonder preachers find it surpassingly easy to carry on about God's tender goodness

without the slightest reference to his goodness in Christ. (See also the popular delight in stanza 2 of "How Great Thou Art.")

12. This likeable god-the god of our vain American imagination-is a god in process, continually morphing, his lineaments subject to constant refinement and redefinition. In his current form our god judgeth not, neither doth he condemn, whether temporally or eternally. Hell is no more. In this god's dispensation none are punished, all are saved. (Note the creeping universalism in the actual eschatology of our seminary classrooms and the operative eschatology of our funeral sermons.) When it comes to the choices we make in daily life, this god consistently affirms and approves no matter how we opt. If he frowns at all, it is only at our failure to affirm and approve of each other as fervently and steadily as he does. In matters of sexual conduct, traditionally a hot topic for the pious, he offers fewer and fewer opinions. He may chide us these days for our failure to attend to the poor, but the chiding is always gentle and tentative, never strong enough to leave us in any doubt at the end of the day that he does, after all, like us.
13. In dealing with this god, a crucified Messiah is quite beside the point.
14. To the extent that we find our hearts embracing this god, we set ourselves against the Lord. The two are not one and the same, as even the vainest imagination will at some point recognize. The Lord, after all, shows himself again and again to be thoroughly unlikable. Ask the residents of Sodom, or the chariot drivers in Pharaoh's pursuing army. Ask Achan, the fellow whose fingers got sticky at Jericho. Ask Absalom, or Ahab, or the residents of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Ask Ananias and Sapphira. Ask any American Christian who finds it increasingly easy to

sympathize with such as these.

15. *Ask American Christians, and one will get the sense from many that it is not only our prerogative but indeed our duty to turn away from the Lord God, and from his anointed, and instead to embrace the god we like, that is, the god who likes us. And so we are doing.*

STEP 3. "He who sits in the heavens laughs." (Eternal Problem)

16. *Unfortunately the Lord is not a God who goes away that easily. Among other things, his Word abides whether we like it or not, whether we heed it or not. One sign of this abiding is the enduring and inescapable content of the Bible. We cannot read it without encountering passage after passage that causes us to squirm. The squirming gives us away, as in the present instance of Psalm 2. We cannot read it without understanding that at one deeply inward level we are in furious revolt against the God to whom the psalm bears witness.*
17. *Come to think of it, might there be something quite deliberate about the offensive character of the psalm? Has God not anticipated that rulers now, like rulers then, would kick against it? Has he not expected that we would react with loathing, as we have, to his adoption of David, and is he not using that reaction to expose our more primal loathing of him? Has the Lord not been using this psalm, in other words, to harden our hearts?*
18. *Be this at it may, the Lord, seeing our reaction, chuckles. He does so derisively. Our initial piety notwithstanding, he has caught us in the act of treason.*
19. *Though to say this presumes that the one who sits in the heavens is in fact the Lord and not another-that likable god of our manifest preference, for example. Here too it pays to keep one's ears attuned to the sound of ominous laughter.*

20. Medieval Christians found echoes of that laughter in the ruins of Rome, scattered hither and yon across the face of Western Europe. Abraham Lincoln discerned it on the fields of Gettysburg. Are you and I prepared to hear the cackles at Ground Zero, or in the AIDS epidemic, or in that seamy, dreary wasteland called 200 channel TV? Suburbanites might discover them in the cities and school systems they have long since fled, though the evidence suggests we've chosen not to. Even so, the slums abide. So does the drug culture, and rampant illegitimacy, and corporate misbehavior, and all manner of anxiety and worry and fear and heartache, and always-inexorably-aging and illness and accident and death. All these are-or ought to be-clear signals that [Christian] America's likeable god is a toothless deity of no standing whatsoever in the real world. Whoever runs this show is indeed at work with a "rod of iron," and there is no one who escapes being struck by it, no, not one.

STEP 4A: " I have set my king upon...my holy hill." (Eternal Solution A)

21. But if we still don't get it, then behold the greatest sign of the Lord's derision. This is the spectacle he mounted in that awful day when he set his king-not David, but David's Son-on the holy hill-not Zion, but nearby Golgotha. He hangs there clearly identified in Latin, Hebrew and Greek as King of the Jews. Does the multilingual identification not invite all people to see him not merely as the Jews' king but as the representative of all kings? What else can it mean when we hear of him that "he bore our sins on the tree"?
22. Jesus' crucifixion is therefore a statement of the Lord's regard for all kings of the earth. No, he does not like us. No, the Lord is not by any stretch of the vainest

imagination a likeable deity. Yes, he does and will smite us with a rod of iron, even as the hammer drove those nails through the hands and feet of the king he sent to represent us all. So it is that Christ crucified is the Word by which the Lord will continue to “speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury.” (Is this why so many American Christians seems so desperate to adorn their worship spaces with “the empty cross”? -“Be warned, O rulers of the earth...”)

STEP 4B. The [LORD] said to me, “You are my son, today I have begotten you.” (Eternal Solution B)

23. *Comes the mystery-the awesome wonder. The king who died on the hill as our representative was raised from the dead, and thereby revealed as the Lord’s Son. (See Paul’s preaching in Ac 13:33, where this verse is associated explicitly with the resurrection.)*
24. *At once we see the depth of our treason. We killed no petty tyrant, representative of a feeble, parochial deity, but the very Son of the God whose finger rests on the switch of life and death.*
25. *But we also see at once the inexpressible depth of God’s mercy. He let us kill his Son so that through his Son he might call us forth from our own pending destruction to new life.*
26. *After all, if Christ died as our representative, then he surely lives as our representative. Then all who acknowledge and own this representation can likewise expect to be “begotten” of the Lord and identified, with Christ, as the Lord’s own child with all the hope and promise that such a designation entails. (See Step 6 below.)*
27. *So it is that the unlikable Lord who likes us not at all turns out to be the God of love whose love for us exceeds*

all possible imagining; a love sufficient to save us from the rod of iron that he continues so busily to wield.

STEP 5. "Serve the LORD with fear. With trembling, kiss his feet." (Internal Solution)

28. *Christ, the LORD's anointed, is no escape from the rod of iron. In fact he himself now directs its use. This is surely one reason why St. Paul echoes the psalm with his exhortation to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12)." He writes this as the concluding reflection on his great end-time vision of every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. That final outcome necessarily entails a constant breaking and smashing of present delusions, false hopes, and misdirected loyalties, many of them lurking steadily within our own hearts. Hence the necessity, for example, of our weekly exercise in confession, which all of us would do well to take much more seriously than we often do. The sin of idolatry keeps springing up in my heart like dandelions in my lawn. I dare not leave it unattended. For his part, the Spirit of Christ will never pass up a chance to have at it with the weed killer.*
29. *Yet a promise attends the smashing and breaking-or in line with the new metaphor, the poisoning-which Christ directs. Healing and mending will follow. So will brand new growth and resurrection. Here is all the inducement we need to quit settling for the folly of the likable god who merely likes us but never loves us; the worship of whom entails endless pretence that all is more or less well in what is, in truth, a deeply damaged world. In contrast to fantasy, Christ offers strong reality, at once terrifying yet so full of hope and promise that none who taste it can ever let it go.*
30. *Not the least of Christ's promises-one that rightly*

causes fear and trembling in those who serve him-is a promise to use us as he himself was used in the Lord's grand project of saving the nations. As St. Paul for one so eloquently testifies, this means being broken and smashed so that others, being led to Christ, will also be made whole. There is nothing likable about such a prospect, of course. On the other hand, those who embrace it will find, with Paul, the endless taste of joy, to say nothing of the Lord's final, affirming word: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

STEP 6. " Blessed are all who take refuge in him." (External Solution)

31. *Such a Word is hardly one that we will want to dodge or flee. Neither is the God who speaks this Word a God to hide from, or to try somehow to replace. Is the Lord fearsome and terrifying? By all means. Yet through Christ his anointed one sees these attributes for what they finally are: a saving terror; a fearsomeness for us.*
32. *We thought, did we not, to defend our friends and neighbors from such a God? Isn't that, at least in part, what drove our struggle against the yoke of this ugly little psalm? What fools we were! Do we not now see how God's fearsomeness in Christ, on our behalf, is among his finest, most pleasing attributes? Is that fearsomeness not the first and finest of reasons for recommending him to our neighbor?*
33. *"Imagine this," we might say. "You are surrounded on all sides by the terror of the Lord. Only this time you are not that poor slaving fool of a chariot driver. This time you're the young mother, the wizened patriarch perhaps. One thought consumes you, that you should yet be able to usher your little ones safely down the amazing path that has opened up through the midst of the sea.*

Freedom beckons. The crowd surges forward. Already voices in front are shouting back the news that the far shore is in view. So tell me: how glad are you right now that the Lord who surrounds you is fierce and deadly in his wrath?"

- 34. "How good is that?" we might say. "How lucky are we that we get to recommend such a God to you? Do come. Switch sides. Join the crowd!" And if they hem and haw-if, in particular, they plead their unworthiness, how's this for a retort: "Just do it, for Christ's sake!"*
- 35. And then, more winsomely: "The things you get to be in on when the feet you kiss belong to Jesus." Question: how blessed are we when we take refuge in Christ? Answer: so blessed that we ourselves become the royal subject of the psalm. We are the Lord's anointed whom he will set on his holy hill. We are he before whom the nations tremble, we too the wielders of the iron rod. Think Paul: "All things are yours... (1 Cor 3: 21-22). Think Christ: "Receive the Holy Spirit. The sins you forgive, forgiven they are. As for sins you retain, they are retained" (Jo 20:23).*
- 36. To think, in other words, that we, in Christ, are David. Therefore we, at one and the same time the rebellious rulers of the nations, are to pay the tribute of repentance in part by kissing our own saintly feet. We do this when we honor our calling in Christ and allow ourselves, in counter-cultural fear and trembling, to exercise the awesome royal authority that the Lord's anointed has entrusted to us.*
- 37. Imagine that! Phony rulers, broken by the Word, become real rulers through the Word. Soli deo gloria!*

*Jerome Burce
Lakewood, Ohio
14 April 2002*

The Kingdom of God in Today's Mission Theology – A Controversy. PART TWO

Colleagues,

Here is the second half of the book-review-essay begun last week and posted as ThTh 369. The book that triggered these ruminations is: *CONSTANTS IN CONTEXT: A THEOLOGY OF MISSION FOR TODAY*, By Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004. Pp.xxii, 488. Paperback \$30. [Part I of the essay is available on the Crossings web-page <www.crossings.org> Click on Thursday Theology.]Peace & joy!

Ed Schroeder

I have another Roman Catholic conversation-buddy at missiology meetings who agrees (mostly) that the KoG initiated by Jesus is God's regime-change with sinners, but he wonders whether I've got a hangup always harping about the forgiveness of sins. "That's one of many NT metaphors" for what the KoG is, he reminds me. And that's a good reminder. Forgiveness of sins is not THE shibboleth, the word you MUST recite in order to be missiologically kosher. So here's what I recently passed on to him: Is Forgiveness of Sins a required shibboleth for Christian mission theology? Nope.

- A. I am not (repeat NOT) saying that if you don't mention forgiveness of sins [FoS] you're not kosher.
- B. What I am saying is that FoS clearly focuses THE good news on healing the sinner's God-disconnect.
- C. There are umpteen (well, at least a dozen or so) other Biblical metaphors for this operation. Central to all of them is that the sinner-and-God fracture gets remedied.
- D. Just off the top of my head I remember these:
 - Luke's penchant for lost and-found rhetoric (chapter 15) And it is lost from God and found again by God (through the work of Christ) that he's talking about, better, that his Jesus is talking about. Though Luke does get specific about FoS in his mission mandate at the end—even putting it in the mouth of the Risen One.
 - John's metaphors of “not having” God's own Life and “having” it. What that Life is all about, and how the “having” happens, shows up throughout his Gospel. He makes it “perfectly clear” – just in case the reader missed it—in his closing verse of chapter 20.
 - Paul's many metaphors for the Gospel healing the God-malady: bondage/freedom; cursed/blessed; slaves/heirs; bastards/adopted kids; and the biggie in 2 Cor 5 –not reconciled/reconciled to God. [N.B. I didn't even mention justification!]
 - The Epistle to the Hebrews likes the cultic lingo. E.g., Two diff. sorts of priests—one who doesn't (cannot) access the mercy-seat of God for sinners, and One who does.
 - Etc.

Summa. All of these say: Christ's unique work is to heal the God-fracture for folks. All these biblical metaphors are utilized to proclaim: Christ does it. And the writers do not

intimate that there may be other options for getting this business done. They may be mistaken in that claim, but that they make such a claim is indisputable.

Ergo, FoS is not my required shibboleth. Not at all. Attending to humankind's God-fracture, the Gen. 3 agenda, is what I'm hollering about. The Bible offers many metaphors for this—and other languages doubtless have others that are useful. FoS probably is, however, a most obvious metaphor for getting the God-problem fixed. Also an “easy” image from which to move on to the human corollary it invites, viz., “faith,” the trusting reception of the forgiveness offer. No wonder it appears often in NT rhetoric for the gospel.

At last year's week-long international missiological gathering in Port Dickson, Malaysia, we participants encountered the same two alternate readings for the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Herewith a few lines from my ThTh report to the listserve. [For the full text GO to ThTh #325 & 326, September 2 & 9, 2004 on the Crossings website: www.crossings.org]

THE TWO GOSPELS AT PORT DICKSON

Teresa Okure called that to our attention at the midpoint of our 8 major presentations. “‘Integrity of the Mission’ is given full attention in the 4 papers we have heard so far,” she said, “but no one yet has attended to ‘in the light of the Gospel.’ What is that Gospel? What its Light?” And then she gave her own answer focused on Jesus's life and work and, as I recall, in her view an event both “new” in God's work in the world and “necessary ” for gospel to be Gospel – and for mission to have “integrity.” She was offering us her version of the Gospel, a version I'll call Gospel B below. But that wasn't the version

we began with in the first of the 8 papers. Call that one Gospel A. Here are its contours. . . .

Gospel A is the mission Gospel offered in Constants in Contexts. S&R designate their own mission theology model as “prophetic dialogue.” “Prophetic” means saying “no” to inhuman and unjust actions in human affairs throughout the world—and a decisive “no” to the sinful structures supporting them. [Here is where sin does get into the conversation, but not sin that needs forgiveness, rather sin that calls for extermination. Sorry, sinner. God’s old regime is to be enacted here.] That prophetic “no” is also addressed to such destructive “sins” in our own and other religions.

“Dialogue” signals the mission agenda for Christians’ encountering fellow worldlings from other world religions. Insofar as they are not culpable of the bad ethics that would activate the prophetic rubric, we are counselled to “recognize God’s surprising presence outside of our exclusively Christian parameters.” ... People joining us as “part of God’s life and God’s vision for the world.” (303) The premise is that God has only one regime operational in the world—and that regime consists of this: “God is a fountain of sending love.” (303) That mono-regime practices no hermeneutics of suspicion, never ever anything that might be called the wrath of God. And it surely is in no way critical of good people—of whatever religious persuasion. Never mind Jesus’ constant critique of the very ethical lives (Torah-faithfulness) of the Pharisees he encountered, or Paul’s post-Damascus critical survey of his own life as a Torah-faithful Hebrew.

The presupposition for meeting the noble believer of other religions is that the Augsburg descriptor does NOT apply to her—“not fearing God, not trusting God, and curved into

oneself.” Thus she really is not a candidate for the forgiveness of sins. What’s to forgive? If forgiveness is the alleged center of Christ’s KoG as God’s “regime-change,” then for her Christ did indeed “die for nothing.” (NRSV Gal 2:21).

We didn’t succeed in Malaysia last year—despite all our hype about dialogue with people of other faiths—to have any dialogue among ourselves about these conflicting visions of the Gospel. And in, with, and alongside that, no dialogue about the reality of the human dilemma, a.k.a., sinners, for whom the Gospel is good news. We haven’t succeeded in the American Society of Missiology either. Some say that’s just not the place for it. I wonder why not?

But that is where dialogue is surely needed. In-house. S&R are clear in the type of Gospel of God’s Kingdom that they want at the center of “a theology of mission for today.” *Mutatis mutandis*, it is the same theology that elicited the prophetic “no” from the Lutheran reformers in the tortured “dialogue” of the early years of the Reformation. And here is where conflicting hermeneutics return. The ancient scholastic theological axiom, “grace does not displace nature, but brings it to perfection,” was abandoned by the Augsburg Confessors, though it had been their theological heritage too. The main reason they did so, they said, was that theology done according to the nature/grace axiom invariably diminishes the reality of sin [it can’t REALLY be that bad, can it?] and correlatively necessitates a much diminished Christ, surely not one crucified and risen. It results in both sin and Christ being reduced in dimensions.

In the nature/grace axiom sin is seen as a moral defect, a deficit. Granted, human “nature” IS imperfect, but what’s still left there is OK. Needed basically is a repair job, not a full mortification and then vivification. Christ’s role as God’s

perfect agent of grace (though not God's only grace-agent) is to supply what is lacking in defective/damaged sinners and thus bring them to righteous perfection.

No way, said the Reformers. That's not the Biblical witness for either the bad news or the good news. And there, of course, we're back to hermeneutics: How do you read the Bible? Theologies of Mission cannot escape that sticky wicket either. Any claim about "constants" in Christian mission looks back to warrants in the Bible. Every looking back uses lenses, a.k.a., hermeneutics.

The scholastic hermeneutic derives from the nature/grace axiom above. The Lutherans rejected that axiom. It underdiagnosed the defect in "nature," they claimed, and correspondingly it needed a lesser Christ to supply the grace than is needed for healing. Their alternate axiom (you've heard it before in these postings) was the law/promise hermeneutic, which the Biblical writers themselves used. That's what they claimed. Here the law-lens let them see Scripture's own diagnosis of sin as "no fear of God, no trust in God, and incurvature into self." And the Gospel-lens exposed how radical, how Good and how New (how gosselly), Christ's regime-change with sinners really was. Too good not to be trusted.

Even with their modernity (Missio Dei, liberationist reign of God, and Christic universalism) S&R have not left the nature/grace axiom. Nor, I imagine, do they want to. As they spell out the "'six constants of Mission" in the three major sections of their own "prophetic dialogue" proposal in Part III-295ff, 317ff, 340ff-the scholastic/Lutheran standoff re-surfaces.

E.g., sin on p. 302-"humanity without the full understanding of the depths of God's love," a deficiency notion vs. the

“activist” enmity toward God in the Augsburg description cited above.

E.g., Christ crucified on p. 317, “Jesus was handed over to death because of his convictions about the radical transformation of the religious and political world that the reign of God demanded” vs. the Reformers alternate proposal (quoting Paul in Romans 4): “He was handed over to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification.”

Luther is no major player in this otherwise intentionally ecumenical book. He is mentioned six times. One citation even hypes him (quoting pioneer Lutheran missiologist James Scherer) as “a creative and original missionary thinker,” but there is no follow-up on what that all might mean. Luther does get a bum rap, I think, in another reference to his “penal substitution” theory of the work of Christ. Which puts him in the Type A column of mission theologies on the S&R blueprint: “key word: law.” That’s a howler.

So they don’t know Luther. That’s evident even apart from this boo-boo. But the same is true of lots of Lutherans, also Lutherans talking about the KoG in missiology today. They too don’t know. But they could, just by looking into Luther’s Large Catechism with its explanation of the KoG petition of the Lord’s Prayer.

“What is the kingdom of God? Answer: Simply what we heard above in the Creed [the immediately preceding section of his catechism], namely, that God sent his Son, Christ our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, to bring us to himself, and to rule us as a king of righteousness, life and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience. To this end he also gave his Holy Spirit to deliver this to us through his holy Gospel and to enlighten and

strengthen us in faith by his power.” Note the trinitarian theology in this KoG proposal.

Is that regime-change or what? But notice WHERE the regime changes—in our God-relationship, and that bi-laterally. First from God’s side in God’s “sending Christ . . . to bring us to himself,” and subsequently from our side in a “faith” that now trusts this rule-change “given” by the Holy Trinity.

In the next paragraph Luther signals the mission trajectory of this kingdom petition. “This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and also in order that it may find approval and gain followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom.”

Is there any connection here to the agenda being hyped in much of KoG theology today, the agendas of peace, justice and the integrity of creation? Not in this kingdom petition for Luther. That’s not the KoG agenda. “From this you see that we are not asking here for . . . a temporal, perishable blessing, but for an eternal, priceless treasure and for everything that God himself possesses. ”

Are then the this-worldly blessings of peace, justice and creation’s preservation not in the Lord’s Prayer? Yes indeed, they are, but they come in the fourth petition with what all comes under the umbrella of “daily bread.” God gives daily bread—“even to the godless and rogues”—thus apart from any Christ-component in the transaction. It’s God’s left-hand regime in action. It happens apart from the efforts of the One now sitting at God’s right hand. In short, all those daily bread goodies do not bring the super-goodies in the KoG

package—"bring us to God and generate faith."

Yet daily bread is big stuff. Just how big is that loaf? "Everything that belongs to our entire life in this world. . . not only food and clothing and other necessities for our body, but also peace and concord in our daily activities, associations, and situations of every sort with the people among whom we live and with whom we interact—in short, in everything that pertains to the regulation of both our domestic and our civil or political affairs." Never once does Christ's name appear as Luther expounds on the daily-bread petition. Why not?

God has other agents assigned to these agendas. Hundreds of them! "Governments . . . rulers . . . the emperor, kings, and all estates, especially the princes of our land, all councilors, magistrates, and officials." And even closer to home "spouse, children, and servants . . . faithful neighbors, and good friends, etc." In Luther's vocabulary these agents are all God's left-handers—caring for and preserving God's old creation and us within it.

But they—Christians included in their left-hand callings—are incapable of fabricating the New Creation. They do not have the wherewithal to bring on the KoG, the regime-change that reconciles sinners to God. Godly agents they indeed are. But not "God-ly enough" to carry out the task of the incarnate son of God—in his body on the tree. It's that simple. God was in Christ attending to that agenda. Scripture never predicates this achievement to any other of God's manifold agents throughout the world.

But after Easter—after Christ's achievement—he does pass on this unique authority to his disciples—expressis verbis "to forgive sins." So with those connections, they become agents

for the regime-change that was once his and his alone. Themselves now re-created to have a right-hand in addition to their left, they become “little Christs” in the right-hand regime called KoG. Of course, they get this clout, and the chutzpah to exercise it, only by virtue of God’s original Right-Hander hanging on to them—and they to him.

Summa. The agenda of peace, justice and the integrity of creation is the stuff of the daily bread of human life; it is not the stuff of the KoG, God’s reconciling regime-change with sinners. The fourth petition is distinct from the second. In both we are still petitioners. It is still the same deity, with two different agendas. One cares for creation, the other redeems it. The scripture’s own anthropomorphic image of an ambidextrous deity helped Luther get a hold of it.

One fundamental “creative and original” element in Brother Martin’s missiology is that the mission of God’s regime-change (a.k.a. the KoG) has a constant venue INSIDE the existing church. The church itself is a constant mission field, because “other” Gospels regularly find home there, just as they do in the non-church world. So the baptized, when they get hooked on these other gospels, become a mission field. Right from the first generation of church history it was so. The Galatian church became a mission field again AFTER Paul had evangelized there. Already within his lifetime an “other” Gospel came there to roost. Ditto for the Corinthian congregation, where a Gospel of pneumatic ecstasy moved in to supplant the one the apostle had planted there.

That might be called one of Luther’s mission axioms: Wherever an “other” Gospel is the one people trust, there is the mission field. The semi-Pelagian preaching and practice of the medieval Latin church was an “other” Gospel. The “Platzregen” [cloudburst] of THE Gospel was passing away. Thus, by

definition, the Holy Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Church—even with nearly 100% of its citizens baptized—became a mission field. That was Luther's mission field. He acknowledged that outside Europe there were mission fields aplenty. But inside the Holy Roman Empire was where God had put him to promote the Platzregen. Luther found the Platzregen image in the OT prophets (Amos 8 for one) where God's cloudburst has ceased. Drought prevails with people "running to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it." And why? Because God has had enough of their infidelity and has moved the Platzregen elsewhere. Though the downpour is a refreshing image, it has a critical edge. If/when God's refreshing rain (his reign of mercy) is scorned, God moves the Platzregen to new mission fields. Note who is the prime mover in mission movements.

Luther's definition of mission in action could be as simple as "turning on the faucet" to let this cloudburst happen. Whether or not "Christianity" has arrived in any given place does not yet verify that the Platzregen is happening. You need to check the rain-gauge and see what's in it. It's not enough that there is something in the rain-gauge. You have to sample the contents: is it Gospel or isn't it? As with the wine and wineskins Jesus spoke of, other liquids also show up to mimic the real stuff. ABSENCE of Gospel in the rain-gauge = ABSENCE of the Platzregen = PRESENCE of the mission field. That may be just as true in any American congregation of whatever denomination as it is in the streets of majority Buddhist Bangkok. Check the rain-gauge.

Summa. S&R's mission theology of "prophetic dialogue" has its hand on a different faucet. It's the faucet of the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, from which God's blessings do indeed flow. They put it under the rubric of the Kingdom petition. But it doesn't fit there. That's a different faucet.

Peace, justice, integrity of creation shower upon the earth because God is God. The KoG cloudburst comes only because Jesus is the Christ.

*S&R have produced a powerful case for the mission theology they propose. One signal of its power is that at last month's annual meeting of the ASM, a new member of the society, a Mennonite, I believe, seeing Schroeder on my name-tag, came to thank and praise me for producing *Constants in Context*. It took me a few seconds to catch on that he thought I was Roger Schroeder. As a newcomer he hadn't met either of us before. But he had read the book and he was euphoric. I led him to Roger, who was just across the way, introduced him, and then heard his thanks and praise repeated as I faded away.*

"Everybody" sees S&R's work as the successor to what has been the modern classic text, David Bosch's TRANSFORMING MISSION, his magnum opus, his life's work (1991). Bosch was tragically killed in his native South Africa in an auto accident just as his book was coming off the press. His own hermeneutic lenses were those of Dutch Reformed Calvinism. Though Luther gets more page-space and more knowledgeable appreciation in Bosch's book, the notion of Kingdom of God that glues his work together is not Luther's. It's Calvin's unitary notion of God's one and only one regime. Jesus does not constitute a "regime-change" on God's part, but a fulfillment of what God has already been doing from eternity. We humans are the ones who do the changing—in ourselves and in our world—once we have encountered God's one consistent regime. But God doesn't change. Ditto for God's regime.

Conclusion

The controversy about the KoG is a controversy about how to read the NT texts where the term occurs. It is also a controversy about Christology—both the work and the person of

Christ: what was “God in Christ” doing? and what sort of person does Christ have to be in order for this work to happen? The KoG, when it arrived in Jesus, was a conflict-concept from the very first pages of the NT. Starting with King Herod’s bloody response at Bethlehem, to the kingdom cross-examinations in the courtrooms of the Sanhedrin and of Pilate, to the disciples’ own “dumb” question seconds before Jesus’ ascension—“Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom?”—they don’t get it. It’s perceived as a new way to manage the world, not God’s new way to “manage”—mercy-manage—sinners. You might write an entire church history—all 2 millennia of it—using that controverted theme, the KoG, as the cantus firmus. It was the fight between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Holy Roman Pontiff throughout the Middle Ages, it was Luther and his opponents both to the left and to the right, it’s in today’s ecumenical theology—not just missiology—across the board. It’s in, with, under large chunks of America’s global Messianism today.

The alternate perspective proposed above, in a few theses—

- 1. Law/promise lenses are the Lutheran proposal for reading the Scriptures.*
- 2. Those lenses let us see the ambidextrous word and work of God—left and right—in Scriptures.*
- 3. Two distinct regimes (from the same God) are illuminated by such Scripture reading.*
- 4. Bi-focal reading of these regimes exposes the KoG in Jesus as God’s regime-change with sinners.*
- 5. This KoG is a change “coram deo,” where God and human sinners interface and interact, not “coram hominibus,” where human sinners interface and interact.*
- 6. “Coram deo” does not relegate KoG to some “spiritual” unreal world, but focuses it at the center of human lives—what we fear, love and trust. Or don’t fear, love, and trust.*

7. God's manifold agents in God's old regime are powerless to alter the realities of human life "coram deo." Their turf and competence is coram hominibus. No more.
 8. By definition "coram deo" regime-change happens only when Deus (e.g., in his beloved Son) takes the initiative. So a particular "person" is necessary for the "work" of regime-change to happen at all.
 9. Human beings, even with "image-of-God" heredity, aren't person-enough to do it. However, after their Christ-encounter, it's a different story.
 10. And how long will it last? How long will either regime last? In Matthew 24 Jesus gives a clue: "Heaven and earth (including God's providential care and preservation regime therein) will pass away, but my words (e.g., Son, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven.) will never pass away." Seems clear. One of God's regimes is terminal. The other (hallelujah!) isn't. We have his word for it.
 11. KoG mission theology is grounded in the one that lasts.
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Epilogue—

A Lutheran "theology of mission for today" is what those folks at Luther (sic!) Seminary should be confecting in their fall conference. My counsel—too late, of course, since the program is printed, the topics assigned (and besides, they didn't ask me)—is to scrub the focus on social-cultural contexts, and be REALLY RELEVANT to the American THEOLOGICAL context we live in. And do so by . . .

1. spelling out "regime-change" as the distinct Lutheran claim for what the NT says about Christian mission, and doing so contra the mono-regime theology that has hijacked the Kingdom of God in America's mainline

churches;

- 2. getting mono-regime theologians—starting with S&R—onto the program as presenters of their convictions, and then letting real dialogue ensue. Paul on Mars Hill once more—possibly even Luther’s Leipzig debate revisited;*
- 3. tossing up this regime-change Gospel against some of the other gospels deceiving American Christians today and supplanting the real one—e.g., rapture religion, folk piety of God Bless America, purpose-driven lives. Once more having those very folks on the program so genuine dialogue could occur. Areopagus again;*
- 4. inviting a Muslim, Hindu or Jewish theologian to dialogue with one of Luther Seminary’s profs about God himself engineering a regime-change with sinners. Why Christians hear that as super Good News, and then listen and learn (maybe/maybe not) why the dialogue partner doesn’t hear it as such;*
- 5. inviting President Bush to come for a conversation among Christians on regime-change in today’s world. He came to CALVIN College a few weeks ago. Why not LUTHER Seminary?*

Those are surely some of the “constants in our American context” these days. A mission theology engaging these realities in our context would be a contribution to the concern about the Gospel in our Culture, as nobody else is doing, so far as I know.

Even if Luther Seminary did just one of these, I might sign up. But would they accept my registration?

EHS

The Kingdom of God in Today's Mission Theology – A Controversy. PART ONE

Colleagues,

This is a book review—and then again it is not. It is a jeremiad about what passes for “the Kingdom of God” in much of today’s mission theology—and then again it is not. For besides Jeremiah for its plaintive parts, ThTh 369 draws on Isaiah for its positive pitch. That positive pitch is to refill the Kingdom of God wineskin with its original NT “new wine” and to do so Isaianically. To wit, with God’s Suffering Servant, a.k.a Jesus, and the agenda spelled out in the very prose of Isaiah 53. In a sentence the positive pitch is this: The Kingdom of God is Jesus’ own mission to close the gap between God and sinners. For a second sentence, here’s how it happens: as God’s sweet-swapper he is “wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed” (NRSV Is. 53:5). Some of you readers may wonder: Is there really any fuss about this? Mission theology folks (technical name: missiologists) know there is. Widespread missiological opinion these days sees the Kingdom of God as (mostly) something else. So, if interested, read on.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

CONSTANTS IN CONTEXT: A THEOLOGY OF MISSION FOR TODAY, By Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004. Pp.xxii, 488. Paperback \$30.

They've hijacked the Kingdom of God. Not just Bevans & Schroeder in this new text on mission theology. They're not alone. They actually speak for a broad consensus in missiology today—across the ecumenical spectrum from the Roman Catholic heritage of Bevans/Schroeder, through today's mainline Protestantism—many Lutherans too (sob!)—all the way over to the Mennonites. And their book is already widely regarded as “classic,” the textbook for missiology in the 21st century. In my judgment it is “classically” wrong.

Here's my thesis:

The Kingdom of God (aka Rule, Realm or Reign of God) that is the hub of this book's mission theology is NOT the Kingdom of God [hereafter KoG] proclaimed in the New Testament. The KoG in the NT is God's own “regime-change,” centered in God's forgiving sinners for Christ's sake, instead of “counting trespasses,” as Paul portrays God's “old” regime, an absolutely just regime that was no forgiveness at all, but fairly and squarely paid out the wages of sin. The KoG offered in Constants in Contexts is not this good news for the global God-problem of the human race.

Instead KoG is portrayed as God's own project to restore creation toward the paradigm of mythic Eden, to make the world a better place to live in, “peace and justice” being the major mantra. There is no God-disconnect that needs fixing in this kingdom, at least, no serious one. If that ever was the focus for God's new regime in Christ, it is no longer. Instead KoG

nowadays addresses the dog-eat-dog disconnect of people with each other and with the creation at large, plus the principalities and powers that reinforce such global in-justice and un-peace. That is where the KoG is not yet. That is what the KoG's agenda is for today—and that is where this missional theology proposes to bring it to pass.

So I use the harsh word hijacked. It seems to me that the original KoG has been hijacked like a semi on the interstate highway. The 18-wheeler continues down the road with the same "KoG" logo on the trailer, but the original cargo inside—a.k.a. the original Gospel—has been off-loaded for something else, an "other" Gospel than the Isaianic one cited above.

Not that this "other" Gospel is in itself bad news. Far from it. Peace among peoples, justice for all, caring for creation is indeed good and godly stuff. But it's not the Isaianic agenda that Jesus (consciously, according to the NT witness) assumed. It's not what is labelled KoG anywhere [I'll be brash] in the NT. In Lutheran lingo, this "other loading" for the KoG semi is God's left-hand regime, God's word and work in the old creation to preserve it from chaos and to render life live-able. Yes, it is God's own operation—call it God's kingdom (realm, reign, regime—if you wish)—and humans are enlisted as co-workers—but it is not the KoG that Jesus is all about. He says so in the Gospels—in his kingdom conversation with Pilate (John's gospel), to fractious brothers and to his justice-thirsty disciples (Luke), and elsewhere. "Not my job," he says.

But when Jesus in his very first words in Mark's Gospel speaks of the Kingdom of God whose "time" has come, he's pointing at something else, something much more radical in God's own operations. Something new, brand new, that is "at hand" when HIS "Kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus's KoG is a different, blessedly different, regime. In God's left-hand regime, for all

its blessed benefits, sinners still wind up dead. The wages of sin get paid out to the sinners. In God's new regime in Jesus, they don't. If that's not "regime-change"—on God's part—then nothing is.

For all its benefits, God's left-hand regime has no resources for healing the planet-wide malady of humankind's God-disconnect, labelled in the language of the Augsburg Confession as our "sickness of origin." And what is that? That "since the fall of Adam we all enter the world NOT fearing God, NOT trusting in God and are (instead) constitutionally curved into ourselves." For this God's prior regime has no therapy.

But this grim diagnosis IS addressed full-force in God's NEW regime that came in Jesus, what he himself (on the eve of his death) called God's NEW covenant, God's new deal "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." To get sinners forgiven "necessitates" a crucified and risen Messiah. Forgiveness of sinners is NOT God's standard operating procedure ("son metier," as Heinrich Heine mockingly labelled it). Justice, so touted in the hijacked kingdom, is God's standard operating procedure with sinners according to the Bible. And apart from any regime-change, the results of divine justice are lethal. The last thing sinners should plead for from God is justice.

Forgiveness of sinners is costly grace—it cost God the death of a beloved son. There is no report of God ever having ventured such a regime before. Promised, yes. See Isaiah 53. But promise not fulfilled until the Suffering Servant appeared in the flesh. That constitutes a brand new regime—not just different, but at its core the very opposite of God's normal regime with sinners. That is the uniform message of the NT—from Matthew's first-chapter angel ["he will save his people from their sins"] to the pierced Lamb on the throne in the final chapter of the last book in the NT.

It gives me no joy to say so, but this is patently hidden in the hijacked KoG and the “other” Gospel now carrying the logo. I’ll try to show below that the apostle’s verdict in Galatians about the “other” Gospel which was spooking their congregation brings the same grim consequences today. When this Suffering Servant is not needed for the agenda that he (and he alone, so Christians say) can manage, then Christ died in vain.

They’ve hijacked the Kingdom of God. That’s a strong statement, and today’s majority opinion in mission theology will be just as strong in saying “no way!” So it’s not just Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder (no relation to this reviewer). They have a broad ecumenical fan club. Their book is getting upbeat reviews across the board in the missiological world. And both Steve and Roger [hereafter S&R] are friends of mine, frequent debate partners in recent years in the American Society of Missiology and its global counterpart, the International Association for Mission Studies.

Our debates are regularly focused on this very point: Is the Kingdom of God proclaimed in the New Testament centered in the forgiveness of sinners (and all the effort it took for Christ to make it happen), or is God’s new regime in Christ the “larger agenda” of transforming the fractured world into an eschatological Eden of peace, justice and the integrity of creation?

One side of our debate is exegesis—interpreting the NT texts that speak of the kingdom of God. The other side, also exegetically based, of course, is about the Gospel. How good, how new, is the Good News of forgiveness for sinners that came into our world when Jesus arrived? The fact that “forgiveness of sins” does not appear in the index of Constants in Context—Steve himself called that to my attention—indicates who’s on which side in these conversations.

Roger and Steve are Roman Catholic missiologists—competent scholars at the top of the charts in the ecumenical collegium. Although I shall seek to show the “arch-Roman” center of their mission theology below, they propose to speak for a broad ecumenical consensus in mission theology today. The validity of that intent, to speak for a consensus across the ecumenical spectrum, was signalled in the April 2005 issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Here six reviewers—yes, six, that’s how important the IBMR editor considers the book to be—from six different traditions in today’s Christian world evaluated their work.

The six traditions chosen are “interesting”—Anabaptist, Conciliar (=current catch-all term in the missiological world for all folks from churches in the World Council of Churches, in this case, a Presbyterian reviewer), Evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic. [N.B., Lutheran was not one of them. Lutherans come in under the “conciliar” rubric. But that label gives no theological specifics as the other five labels clearly do.]

All 6 reviewers were congratulatory. Only the Evangelical and Pentecostal reviewers added a caveat or two. The Evangelical’s complaint: “It is unsettling that stream A [of the three streams of theology which S&R trace through the church’s 2000-year history—(A) conservative, (B) liberal, (C) liberationist. More on this below]—the stream of theology this reviewer represents—is characterized by the term ‘law’ and that stream B (the liberal stream) is characterized by the word ‘truth.’ ... Being labelled law-focused in the light of the grace offered in the New Testament makes stream A appear out of touch with its message.”

The Pentecostal reviewer rejoiced that Pentecostal missiology (finally) got specific consideration in a major work in the

field. But he noted that S&R's own mission theology, the book's last 100 pages, which they label "prophetic dialogue" (a "stream C" for the 21st century—liberation and transformation). had little to say about Pentecostal "concern for the perishing multitudes that have yet to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ."

"Constants" is one of the two big words in S&R's title. Which raises the question: just what are the "constants" for mission theology? Deep down, that is what these two reviewers are asking about with their caveats. For S&R the constants are 6-fold. Every mission theology—in each age of the church's history (six by their count)—addresses 6 constants: christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, salvation, anthropology, and culture. The core of their book (208 pages) traces these six constants through each of the church's ages. Of course, the content poured into each of these 6 constants has varied—sometimes widely—by virtue of the contexts (the other "big word") impinging on this age's mission.

But S&R give scant attention to evaluating the contents poured into these constants. E.g., checking them for their own "constancy" in terms of NT specs. They do often identify if the constants of any age are closer to A or B or C theology types (conservative, liberal, liberationist)—and A-types frequently do not get good press. But not much more critical analysis is given of the wine in these wineskins.

Which brings us back to the Pentecostal and Evangelical reviewers. They are asking about a different sort of "constant" for mission. Not a category that inevitably gets attention in mission theology, but a content, a "constant" content, that must (?) be present if the mission theology is to qualify as Christian. Both of these reviewers highlight THE "constant" that is at the very center of the Christian enterprise: "the

grace offered in the New Testament” and “the Good News of Jesus Christ.”

Just what is this Grace, what is this Good News? Whether these two reviewers noticed it or not, their caveats are linked to the fact that S&R have different wine in the “Grace” and “Good News” wineskins, different from what these wineskins hold in evangelical and pentecostal theology. And different too from the Lutheran Reformation heritage. And that, of course, eventually entails the claim, “different from what these wineskins hold in the witness of the NT.”

Here is the jugular for conversation with S&R.

What is the Gospel? What is that Kingdom of God that came in Jesus the Christ? And, of course, behind those two questions the never-absent one of hermeneutics: how do you read the Bible? S&R draw on their Roman Catholic tradition for addressing such questions. But they are not antiquarians; their fundamental theology is patently spiced with contemporary proposals for Missio Dei, a liberationist Reign of God, and a Christocentric universalism, all of which can be read within that tradition.

So my opting for the Lutheran Reformation—and doing mission theology according to that compass—is no more or less parochial.

But there just WAS a serious disagreement in the 16th century in the Latin church about the answers to these questions. And scholasticism (Thomas included) and Luther were on opposite sides of the fence in this inner-catholic debate. No surprise then if S&R and I (and a Pentecostal—wow!—and an Evangelical—wow again!) find ourselves across the fence from each other. Even in our very different contexts from that of these classic ancient theologians.

The debate is about the substance of the Grace and Gospel “constants.”

Luther’s Aha! about the Gospel of justification, he said, was that in a nutshell the Good News is “the forgiveness of sins.” And that is what the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is all about too. Here’s one citation of many: “You should learn that Christian justification, whatever you may think or imagine, is nothing but the forgiveness of sins, which means that [God’s kingdom] is such a kingdom or sovereignty as deals only with sins and with such overflowing grace as takes away all wrath. ...Apart from forgiveness there is and remains nothing but sin which condemns us.” [Sermon from 1529].

If forgiveness of sins is not even listed in the index of Constants in Context (and rightly so, since it plays no role in the book—even in the few references to Luther’s mission theology), then it is patently not a “constant” for S&R’s “theology of mission fortoday.”

The difference centers in the “agenda” that is predicated to Gospel and to KoG. What does the Gospel itself do? What is happening when the KoG is taking place? Lutherans read the NT and see those two terms as synonyms. And the agenda for both is getting sinners un-sinned—and keeping them that way. Getting the God-disconnect of sinners healed—and keeping it healed. Getting unfaith-full God-distrusters to become faith-full God-trusters—and keeping them that way. Faith means “trust” in NT vocabulary, not only Paul’s but John’s as well—and regularly in the synoptic Gospels too. Faith is trusting Christ, a trust focused on his promise of forgiveness.

Lutheran theology, and thus Lutheran missiology too, builds on that forgiveness-Gospel. Once more it seems “perfectly clear” in the fundamental NT mission texts. Take a look:

Luke's mission mandate (24:47): "that repentance and the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his [Christ's] name to all nations."

Or John's Christology cum mission mandate: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (chapter 1)... As the Father sent me, so send I you. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them—and if you don't do it, it won't happen." (chapter 20)

Or Luke's report of Paul's words in Acts 13:39: "By this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses."

And also St. Matthew's classic Great Commission (28:18ff), beginning with Christ's claim of authority, is forgiveness-focused when you note that Matthew centers Jesus' authority in "the Son of Man's authority to forgive sins." (Matt. 9:6) Thus to "make [Christ-] disciples of all nations" is for existing disciples to replicate Matt.9, since because of Christ "God has given this authority to human beings."

Forgiveness of sins is a—if not the—central constant of the Gospel. S&R's mission theology thinks otherwise. We've "discussed" this more than once in our table-talk at conferences. I cannot comprehend why are they disinterested in something so basic, so constant, so perfectly clear, in NT mission theology.

And the same goes for Kingdom of God. If it is indeed God's own regime-change with sinners, then the two terms are nearly synonyms. The old regime—justice-based—was "wages of sin" payoff. Forgiven sinners don't show up at the end of that pipeline. It is only God's regime in Christ—that is the scandalous Christian claim—where sinners come out alive at the end. To establish that regime to the ends of the earth is

Christ's mission mandate. Forgiveness of sins is the Christian "constant" for every mission "context."

Nowadays in missiology—at least academic and published missiology—all the hype is on "context." Even Lutherans are souped up about it. Witness the conference recently announced for this fall at the biggest ELCA seminary—Luther Seminary, St. Paul MN—on "The Missional Church in Context—a consultation on developing a contextual missiology."

Though some of Seminex's brightest and best are on the program as major speakers, and the newly-chosen "missional" president of the seminary, also a Seminex grad, will hover over the consultation, I wish they were focused elsewhere. The deep malaise of church life in the USA is not inattention to contexts. It is inattention to content. Even worse ABSENCE of THE constant, the Gospel of THE Kingdom of God, that vitiates church life today in our midst. It's 16th century Europe all over again—ecclesia semper reformanda—the church needing reforming at the core. It's Gospel-absence, Gospel-ignorance. And in the place of the missing Gospel, other gospels have rushed in—seven-fold. And as Jesus once said: the last state of the victim is worse than the first.

What's needed for Mission theology in the 21st century—and for the fading life of wide swatches of the church in the USA—is clarity about what the KoG really is—and isn't. Both on the street and in the academy other Gospels abound. Winsome as they may be, they are competitors to the regime-change that God was in Christ enacting, "reconciling the world to himself, not counting trespasses, but making him to be sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God." (2Cor.5).

Someone once called to my attention that Paul doesn't talk about forgiveness of sinners here, nor much anywhere else. OK.

But he is talking about sin here—as he does 57 other times by my count in his epistles. For the regime-changing remedy what language does he use? What does he do? He ups the ante, goes into hyperbole. In 2 Cor. 5 it's commercial language: reckoning, reconciling, accounts.

Instead of charging sin to the sinner's account—God's otherwise standard-operating-procedure.—God puts it to the account of the sinless one. And that one's assets go to the account of the sinful one. At the end of the sweet-swap exchange sinners get credited with the righteousness OF GOD. That's forgiveness with a twist! Frosting on the cake. Former sinners now walking around with God's own righteousness laced into our DNA. That really ups the ante on forgiveness.

Better said: that signals what's involved—what all's involved—in the forgiveness transaction. Not simply: "OK, you had a bad track record; now that Christ has done his bit, it's all gone." But "you had a lethal God-disconnect; now Christ has sweet-swapped you for that. And IN HIM (note where the former sinner's new God-connect is located) you ARE the righteousness of God."

For so many, I'm told, that sounds so old hat. Depends on who you talk to. A psychiatrist I know tells me: "Ed, at least half of the people who come to my office want their sins forgiven." Recently an Air Force chaplain told us: "I work with a psychiatrist on base who gives me the razz about 'just making folks feel guilty' with my ministry. You've got that wrong, I tell her. They know they're guilty, that's why they come to me. I have God's forgiveness to offer them. Do you have anything like that?"

D.V., PART TWO NEXT WEEK.

EHS

Implications of Luther's Treatise on Good Works for Four Common ELCA Practices and Ideas

Colleagues,

Today's posting comes from Timothy J. Hoyer, ELCA pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Lakewood, New York. Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

FYI. #1. Re: recent book reviews posted on ThTh. I've learned that Barbara Rossing's Rapture Exposed is out in paperback. Another one of you tells me: "Please draw attention to the article in Pro Ecclesia XII/4, Fall 2003, by Matthew Becker, being a 30 page summary of his work on J von Hoffman."

FYI. #2. A few more dewdrops showed up on the Manipur fleece this week. Now \$5K of liquidity.

Implications of Luther's Treatise on Good Works for Four Common ELCA Practices and Ideas

People are constrained by the law. All speeding drivers slow down when they see a police car up ahead on the highway. People

are held back by what they think is immoral or not the right thing to do. And they don't like that. So, when they are told that they are free from the law because they are right to God by faith in Christ, too often their initial response is that they are glad that they can finally do whatever they want.

But that is to act in bad faith toward Christ. That is to bury him again and say that what he wants-their forgiveness from God-means nothing. That is to betray his leadership of forgiveness and love. That is to reject Christ's gift of his Holy Spirit as one's new guide in life. And remember, the Spirit always and only guides with Christ and his forgiveness and love. The Spirit never guides using something else, because that would also betray Christ's leadership.

St. Paul had to repeat his message of Christ making people right with God to Christians in the city of Corinth because the Corinthians said that they were now allowed to do anything they wanted because, if there were no law, then everything was lawful. Paul told such Christians that they mistook their freedom in Christ to be freedom in their own desires. Freedom in Christ is more than libertinism's sort of freedom from the law. Freedom in Christ is to be in Christ, to live following Christ as Lord and Master, not to be in oneself and one's own desires. Of course, Christ as Lord and Master is not Christ as the demanding boss giving orders. Christ as Lord and Master is Christ serving forgiveness and love by a cross. One may be free from the law, but only when one is a slave to Christ.

When Luther repeated Christ's and Paul's message of justification by faith in Christ alone, that is, people are right to God by faith and are free of the law, his listeners also began to do as they pleased and to ignore even the laws of their towns. A friend of Luther's told him that people thought he was implying that good works were no longer required and did

not have to be done at all. He asked Luther to preach some sermons about faith and good works. When Luther eventually agreed and began to write, he got caught up in the message and instead of sermons wrote the *Treatise on Good Works* which was published in 1520.

Luther wrote of good works, but the good works of faith. "The first, highest, and most precious of all good works is faith in Christ, and as it says in John 6.28-29, when the Jews asked him, 'What must we do, to be doing the good work of God?' Jesus answered, 'This is the good work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent' (Luther's Works, Vol. 44, p.23). "It is from faith as the chief work and from no other work that we are called believers in Christ" (p. 25).

Faith in Christ, always and only faith in Christ, is how works are good to God and how "all good works exist" (p. 24). In Luther's day, Christians were taught that only certain works were good to God, such works that were commanded by the church-pilgrimages, joining a monastery, fasting, or being a priest. Regular work or secular work, such as caring for a family, baking bread, working on a farm, were considered to be nothing to God. But Luther, building on faith, said, "God is served by all things that may be done, spoken, or thought in faith" (p. 24). "In this faith all works become equal, and one work is like the other; all distinctions between works fall away, whether they be great, small, short, long, many, or few. For the works are acceptable not for their own sake but because of faith, which is always the same and lives and works in each and every work without distinction, however numerous and varied these works always are" (p. 26). "Faith makes no distinction among works, then where faith is present such trumpeting and urging of one kind of work above another cannot exist. Faith desires to be the only way of serving God, and will allow this name and honor [serving God] to no other work, except in so far

as faith imparts it, as it does when the work is done in and by faith" (p. 33).

Next, Luther asserts justification by faith alone even though others said that "faith alone" caused people to think that good works were no longer needed. Luther talks of the "work of faith," which is to trust, love, and fear God to be gracious and kind for Christ's sake. He states that nothing tells a Christian what to do except faith in Christ, not even the law, the Ten Commandments, or what some call "The Third Use of the Law." "A Christian person living in this faith has no need of a teacher of good works, but he does whatever the occasion calls for, and all is well done" (p. 26). "If every person had faith we would need no more laws. Everyone would of themselves do good works all the time, as their faith shows them" (p. 35).

To Luther, the contrast was between "A Christian who lives in this confidence toward God knows all things, can do all things, ventures everything that needs to be done, and does everything gladly and willingly, not that he may gather merits and good works, but because it is a pleasure for him to please God in doing those things" (p. 27) and "On the other hand, whoever is not at one with God, or is in a state of doubt, worries and starts looking about for ways and means to do enough and to influence God with many good works" (p. 27). Those who do not believe that faith in Christ is the chief work and the only work that makes a person a follower of Christ are the ones who, because of their unbelief, make "church work" more important to God than other work.

Next, Luther, in this treatise, goes on to show how faith does good works. When a Christian has everything go wrong with their life, their goods, their honor, their friends, or whatever they have, they still get to believe that their works are well-pleasing to God, and "that God in his mercy ordains their

sufferings and difficulties for them, whether they be small or great. The great thing in life is to have a sure confidence in God when, at least as far as we can see or understand, God shows himself in wrath, and to expect better at his hands than we now know" (p. 28). Even more, "Beyond all this is the highest stage of faith when God punishes the conscience not only with temporal sufferings but with death, hell, and sin, and at the same time refuses grace and mercy, as though he wanted to condemn and show his anger eternally. To believe at such times that God is gracious and well-disposed toward us is the greatest work that may ever happen to and in a Christian" (p. 29).

The next work of faith is prayer. "But what else are God's blessings and adversities than a constant urging and stirring up to praise, honor, and bless God, and to call upon him and his name?" (p. 40) Also, in the same way, a Christian "is to be on one's guard, to flee from and to avoid all temporal honor and praise, and never to seek a name for oneself, or fame and a great reputation" (p. 42) so that only Christ's name is honored and blessed and praised. God's name is honored and hallowed "when we name it and call upon it in adversity and need. And in the final analysis this is why God sends us much trouble, suffering, adversity, and even death as well" (p. 46).

To trust that God is gracious in times of adversity is not something a person would do on their own. So Christ has "bequeathed and distributed not interest, money, or temporal possessions, but the forgiveness of sins, grace, and mercy unto eternal life, that all who come to [his Supper] shall have the same testament. He died with the intent that this testament become permanent and irrevocable. In proof and evidence of this he has left his own body and blood under bread and wine, instead of letter and seal" (p. 55-56). A Christian thus accepts Christ's invitation to supper, to worship in church,

and does so in order not to make Christ a liar.

To do these works of faith, to honor God's name, to receive Christ's mercy, to pray to God in times of blessing and adversity, is enough to keep a person busy every day. Faith also keeps a Christian busy in being obedient, in parents giving their children the mercy of Christ, in Christians being meek caring for their neighbors' and enemies' needs, in caring for their spouse and being chaste, in using all of one's possessions to feed the hungry, and in speaking well of others. There is so much of such work to do that a Christian will never get all that work done. So, how can anyone think that justification by faith in Christ alone does not talk of good works?

Implications

Here are four practices and ideas in the ELCA that are effected by faith being the chief and only work of the Christian: "Servant of Christ" awards, bigger churches are better churches, church work is to be honored more than other work, and "the Bible says so."

"Servant of Christ" awards are given by some synods to people who have done an extra amount of volunteer work for their congregation. This award is given by the synod to teach everyone else that they should be just as busy volunteering in their home congregation in order to be a good Christian, or to be a servant of Christ. If one does not do as much work for the church, then one is not a servant of Christ. When a Servant of Christ award is given, it is as if the church was saying, "Look at how good this person is and how many good works they have done. You are not as good and should do as much as this person." But how ridiculous for the church to say such a thing when the work of faith is the chief and first work and that

there is no distinction in other works or in how many a person does. How different that award is than the comfort of living in faith. "For Luther whatever is done in faith-even if it be to suffer and endure the infirmities and loneliness of old age-is pleasing in God's sight, for faith fulfills all commandments and makes all its works righteous" (p. 19).

Perhaps the Servant of Christ award could be given to a person who seemingly does little. "The wonderful and righteous judgment of God [Servant of Christ award] is based on this, that at times in the privacy of his home a poor man, in whom nobody can see many great works, joyfully praises God when he fares well, or with entire confidence calls upon God when he is in adversity" (p. 41). Give the reward to the husband who comes to church once a month and during the week tends his wife who is in a wheelchair, who wheels her to the car and gently lifts her in, and does this many times for many years and no one in the church ever sees him do it. But such works of faith are not highly regarded by the church or by members of a congregation, nor are they seen except by the Father in heaven. The "Servant of Christ" awards are given out of doubt that God is pleased with works by faith alone or that even the smallest work-"picking up straw" is awarded God's pleasure because of faith.

Congregations that offer lots of programs-parenting classes, sports, outings for youth to water parks or camps, book clubs, movie clubs-are regarded as better, more Christian, than small congregations that offer only worship, Sunday School, confirmation, and a youth group. The bigger churches that have all those programs are seen as successful, as the model for other congregations. Yet, in all the publicity for those larger churches, one does not hear about faith, about the work of faith in times of adversity, as the reason to join the church.

People are encouraged to participate in the large church's

programs as if their programs were more the proper church thing to do than to join the library's book club or the birthing classes at the hospital.

Which congregations are serving God? Are not they all? Small congregations, which are over half the congregations of any Christian denomination, are equally as pleasing to God because they proclaim faith in Christ. In this society where size matters, people feel better about their congregation if it's bigger and improved, as if Christ forgiving people is not enough reason to feel good about one's congregation. To feel that size matters is to regard Christ forgiving people as less important than the annual craft sale. Faith desires that faith only is seen as serving God.

Another idea included in size matters is that the pastor of a large church is to be more respected than the pastor of a small congregation and to be paid more. If ten pastors of the ten largest congregations in a synod make a statement about divorce and remarriage, they are to be listened to much more than if fifteen pastors of fifteen churches with less than seventy people at Sunday worship were to send a letter to the bishop and all the synod asking for pastoral care in times of teenage pregnancy and possible abortion. Do pastors of large congregations have a different Christ? Do pastors of small congregations not also offer the same mercy of Christ? There should be the same respect for pastors no matter the size of their congregation, and there should even be the same pay.

Similar to Servant of Christ awards is the idea that church work-church council, choir, property committee-is to be more worthy of God's approval than machine work, waitressing, bus driving, or working as a cashier, a shelf stocker, or an electrician at the print shop. Congregations put a lot of effort into cajoling their members to participate in some

church activity and that their church is doing what a church is supposed to do when they get people to participate in some church activity. However, congregations could, according to faith in Christ alone, encourage people to eat dinner together as a family, or to talk to a neighbor they meet in the grocery store or to take pride in their work and do it honestly and respect the people they work with and say only good things about them. Congregations could encourage their members not to do church activities but to call on a housebound neighbor or visit at the county nursing home. "Thus the Christian who in faith stays at home to support the family and to care for his wife and children rather than make a pilgrimage does a truly good work, and one which is commanded by God. Prevalent teaching and popular piety, however, would have it the other way around" (p. 19). A Christian is not Christian or a better Christian because of their church work. A Christian is a Christian only because of their faith in Christ. "It is from faith as the chief work and from no other work that we are called believers in Christ" (p. 25).

Lastly, there is way too much shouting of "The Bible says so" among Christians. Christians loudly voice, "The Bible says this is wrong! The Bible says we can't do that! The Bible is against such things! The Bible says those people are doing terrible things! The Bible says we must be like this, do this, and behave this way!" In the whole *Treatise on Good Works* Luther never says, "The Bible says so," yet he quotes the Bible quite often. How does Luther quote the Bible but not join the loud voices of "The Bible says so"?

Luther bases his teaching on faith in Christ, on the death and resurrection of Christ, on Christ's promise to forgive people and give them eternal life. "Faith must spring up and flow from the blood and wounds and death of Christ" (p. 38). "We must listen to the words of Christ when he institutes the mass and

says, "Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you." In like manner he says over the cup, "Take it and all of you drink of it: this is a new everlasting testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. Do this, as oft as you do it, in remembrance of me...[Christ] has bequeathed and distributed the forgiveness of all sins, grace, and mercy unto eternal life, that all who come to this memorial shall have the same testament" (p.55-56). So Luther repeatedly and assuringly says that faith is the key, the source, the foundation for everything. "God is served by faith." "Faith is the chief work." "If he finds his heart confident that it pleases God..." "Faith (that is the faith or confidence that God is gracious at all times) is the very first, highest, and best from which all other works must proceed, in which they must exist and abide, and by which they must be judged and assessed" (p. 30).

The Bible is a witness to Christ and his testament of forgiveness. And that is how Luther uses the Bible in his treatise. When Luther says that faith is the first and highest work, he quotes John to say, "See? What I teach about faith is what John also witnesses about faith." When he writes that faith makes precious what others think shameful, even death, he quotes the same testimony from Psalm 116.15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (p. 28). He is teaching and preaching the same thing the witnesses of Christ testify to, and he proves it by giving an example of their witness about faith in Christ. "This good will and favor [of God through Christ], on which our confidence rests, was proclaimed by the angels from heaven when they sang on Christmas morn, 'Glory be to God on high, peace on earth, good will to men' [Luke 2.14]" (p. 29).

Luther seems to look at the Bible and ask, "How does this verse talk about faith in Christ? What does this verse say about

faith?" It's as if he approaches the Bible and reads the Bible expecting everything he reads to be about faith in Christ. For example, "And in Psalm 4.6-7, 'The light of thy countenance hovers over us (that is, the knowledge of thy grace through faith) and thereby thou hast made my heart glad" (p. 37). The parenthesis is Luther's own insert. Luther expects to find faith in every verse of the Bible, "For as faith expects, so does it come to pass" (p. 37). Or, "Thus Isaiah rebukes the people of Israel in Isaiah 48. [1-2], 'Hear this, you who bear the name of Israel as if you were the people of Israel, you who swear by the name of God and think you still stand in truth and righteousness.' That means that they did not act in true faith and confidence, which is real truth and righteousness, but trusted in themselves, their works, and in their own abilities" (p.42).

Thus, Christians get to use the Bible and interpret the Bible and use the Bible always in a way that proclaims faith in Christ, and to speak it just like St. Paul, "God shows his love toward us as exceedingly sweet and kind in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners" (p.38). Christians should never shout, "The Bible says that is wrong! We must be true to the Bible. We must only do what Scripture says. The Bible is against that and the Bible is the word of God that cannot be changed." Such ideas about the Bible have nothing of faith in them and nothing of Christ in them. People misuse the Bible that way because they doubt that the work of faith in Christ is all that is needed to be a Christian and to please God. So they look to the Bible to tell them what other works must be done and what works not to do, as if by doing what the Bible directs them to do they will be doing good and God-pleasing works. Luther never uses the Bible that way. He speaks of faith in Christ and then says the Bible also says the same thing and quotes a verse to illustrate how the Bible is also all about

faith in Christ.

Faith in Christ is the first, highest, and most precious work. On the work of faith all other works depend and from it all others flow. Let the ELCA use faith in Christ to direct its actions and ideas.

Timothy Hoyer

The Theology of Johannes von Hofmann

Colleagues,

[Update: Only one new dew-drop on the Manipur fleece this week. Squeezed out it now totals 4K. Still a fair tad to go to get to 70.] This week's posting, a book review by Mark Mattes on the theology of von Hofmann, is a bit more egg-heady than some postings in the past—and will be cherished by readers who cherish this sort of thing. I'm one of that crowd. I was a student at the same university where von Hofmann taught, where his heritage persisted. 'Course, I came along almost a century after he was gone.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

The Self-Giving God and Salvation History: The Trinitarian Theology of Johannes von Hofmann.

By Matthew L. Becker. New York: T & T Clark, 2004. 287 pp. Paperback.

\$39.95. [Amazon price \$35.21]

A book review by Mark Mattes.

No less than Karl Barth judged Johannes von Hofmann (1810-1877) to be the greatest conservative theologian of the nineteenth century. In this masterful study, Matthew L. Becker (theology professor at Valparaiso University) underscores Hofmann's theological genius. He makes the case that Hofmann is to be appreciated in specific ways. Hofmann was (1) a leader in the emerging historical consciousness of the nineteenth century, (2) a careful researcher of Luther's theology, (3) a critic of Schleiermacher's "subjectivistic" methodology, and (4) an appropriator of the doctrine of the Trinity as a fruitful framework for accentuating the communion of the Christian with God.

Indeed, this latter creative thrust of Hofmann's makes him worthy of the utmost attention for contemporary retrievals of the doctrine of the Trinity, which are indebted to the thinking of Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Eberhard Jüngel, Robert Jenson, and many others. Becker notes that Hofmann's Trinitarian "view of God is grounded in the divine love, which is the cause of God's free decision to self-differentiate God's self in history and give God's self (divine kenosis or 'divine self-emptying') in history in order to realize in the human Jesus a new humanity" (xix).

Becker seeks to correct Franz Pieper's misunderstandings of

Hofmann as an "Ich-theologe" [= theologian focusing on the Christian self]. Becker is forceful: Hofmann is not an Ich-theologe but the most important Trinitarian theologian of the last 200 years (xx). Far from being solipsistic in method, Hofmann appealed to a Christian "Tatbestand," the present factual situation of the Christian. This Christian Tatbestand is always mediated in history, culture, and language. The self of the Christian is thoroughly interpreted from the scriptures. This self is also deeply committed to the world as an arena or avenue of service.

Becker also aims to correct Pannenberg's misreading of Hofmann's view of history as "determined by a construct that completely severs 'divine history' from 'profane history'" (xix). Well known as the inventor of the term "Heilsgeschichte" [salvation history], Hofmann sees salvation history as "not a part of world-history, but rather world-history is a part of salvation history" (xix). Hofmann is similar to Pannenberg in the supposition that history must be understood from eschatology. "History is given its unity and meaning by viewing it from its end—not from its beginning—though its end appears in the midst of history and is discernible only in faith" (xix).

Hofmann was the most important representative of the Erlangen School of theology. The Erlangen theologians emphasized baptismal regeneration, an experiential Christianity, a critical appropriation of the Lutheran Confessions, and an organic-historical view of the development of the Bible, the church, and the Confessions (9). Becker wants to gain greater publicity for Hofmann because he senses Hofmann's life-giving approach to theology that has impacted different streams of confessional Lutheranism.

The volume is composed of three parts. The first presents

Hofmann's life and work and offers basic interpretations of Hofmann's theology. The second explores Hofmann's theological method, focusing especially on Hofmann's description of the object of theology, on hermeneutics, and on the rapport between Hofmann and German Idealism (Ranke, Hegel, and Schelling). The third part explores Hofmann's doctrine of God in relation to humanity. It shows Hofmann's doctrine of God as love unfolding itself in a triune way, God as embracing a world of historicity and contingency, God's self-giving as wholly kenotic (self-emptying), the future of humanity as destined for God through the church and sacraments, and the future of God as the fulfillment of creation.

If any statement of Hofmann's is apt to be known today, it is the unfortunate sentence: "I the Christian am for me the theologian the unique material of my scholarly activity" (18). Taken alone, the phrase is misleading. This is because the Christian's *Tatbestand* [present factual situation] is always relational. One's identity is always shaped in baptism and faith by God. And, deepening this conviction is the truth that God is authoring our lives historically in the community of the church and the wider world which upholds the church. Hence, against subjectivism, Becker helpfully corrects any possible misunderstandings of the nature of individual Christian experience. "Communal and ecclesial nature of the experience dictates that the understanding of this experience be compared with and, if necessary, corrected by the understanding of the experience in Scripture and by other Christian theologians" (21). Jesus Christ is the center and focus of all history, which is itself grounded in the Trinity (23).

Theology is indeed grounded in the personal faith of the Christian. But this is itself grounded in the risen Christ, who mediates the historical relationship between God and humans (42). Theology, though rooted in personal faith, is a science,

since it explores and expresses the saving action of God in the world, to the end that humans are in communion with God. Reason is no independent tool but accountable to the unique Tatbestand which upholds it. There are, then, no universal grounds for faith as there are for philosophy. To this reviewer, this is a serious mistake-since philosophy is deeply embedded in highly abstract, though no less mythic, forms of thinking. We never entirely escape from the parochial. Nor should we have to. It is the medium which opens greater dimension of experience and universal truth.

The Bible was the most important source for theology for Hofmann, and the key by which to understand life and the world. His most lengthy work is a multi-volume commentary on scripture. Here he takes a position radically different from either the ultra conservatives, like Hengstenberg, or the historical critics. Hengstenberg was wrong in viewing the Bible as a law book of ahistorical doctrines. However, Rationalists too appeal, with their critical consciousness, to the claims of universal, ahistorical reason (61). Against ultra conservatives, the Bible ought not to be seen as "a infallible scientific document" (71). However, historical critics naively adopt faith in "a philosophical worldview that was itself a kind of rigid, dogmatic skepticism" (66). The answer is to understand that the inspiration of scripture is itself expressed as a historical development (72).

Ahead of his time, Hofmann applied the categories of subjectivity and historicity to God. God is as such a self-unfolding subject expressing the essence of love in history. Here the economic trinity and theological trinity are intimately related, as Barth and Rahner would later develop the teaching. God is no longer impassible. Rather, "the self-emptying that occurred in the incarnation implies a real change in God that is at odds with the classical theistic notions of

God's immutability and impassibility" (179). As kenotic, in the incarnate Jesus Christ, the historical trinity "has assumed a new form of dissimilarity." "The humiliation (tapeinosis) of the son, through which the archetypal world-goal had to endure the limitations and conditions placed on human beings as a result of sin, refers to Christ's relationship to all other human beings" (190). Thus, "only with the conclusion of all history is the historical self-fulfillment of the Trinity complete..." (193).

An important concern of Becker's is Hofmann's revision of the standard Anselmic view of the atonement which teaches that God's wrath must be appeased through vicarious satisfaction. Hofmann noted that this view is inconsistent with scripture and Luther for two reasons: (1) God is wholly self-giving love, not someone who can be bought off and (2) the law is historical and not eternal. With respect to atonement, Hofmann replaces the juridical-legalistic framework of the orthodox with the scheme of Heilsgeschichte. The law belongs to a historical dispensation and is not held inseparably from the core identity of God. God is appeased when we believe the gospel. Otherwise we will inevitably encounter divine wrath in the world.

We might think of Hofmann's genius as steering a course between fundamentalism and modernism. Indeed, he has a robust appropriation of classical Christianity through the lens of Martin Luther that avoids both Biblicism and accommodationism to modern suppositions. Hofmann simply refuses to adopt the stance that became increasingly more prominent in the nineteenth century that the world is fundamentally mechanistic and "godless." In order to uphold his position, he takes the best of German Romanticism, with its emphasis on embodiment, culture, language, and history as a counterweight to demythologizing tendencies in the nineteenth century.

Hofmann's confessionalism is to be taken with the utmost seriousness. In contrast to a rigid doctrinaire approach to the Confessions as a legal code of truth, Hofmann shows that they are refreshingly mediated through a historical consciousness. At some level, all theology is historical theology. Yet, even as historical, they shape and are shaped by a morphology faithful to the gospel that entails that they are no less authoritative for evangelical faith and life. God only speaks through history and the Confessions are valid because they accord with how the gospel is to be articulated. Theology's relevance comes only in fidelity to the gospel as promise.

Hofmann's trinitarianism, so strikingly different from the absence of trinitarian thinking in Schleiermacher, speaks to us today. While the Trinity is not the be-all and end-all of Christian faith, it is the doctrine by which we articulate the grammar of the God of the promise and our rapport with that God. In light of the renewed emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity, Hofmann's is a voice that needs to be heard. Refreshingly, his is a genuinely Protestant voice that has great respect for the catholicity of the church but does not need to ground the church in a hierarchy that is iconic of the triune life.

Matthew Becker has done a stellar job in presenting a detailed portrait of Hofmann, who deserves to be far better known in the English-speaking world than he is. Hopefully his work will lead to renewal in Hofmann studies both in Europe and in North America.

*Mark Mattes
Grand View College
Des Moines, Iowa*

Book Review—THE RAPTURE EXPOSED

Colleagues,

[Update: Last week's fleece, put out for the Manipur Mission, after 7 years worth of ThTh postings, shows 12 drops of dew so far, totalling \$3500. For the 12 of you "dew-ers" we are thankful. Only \$66.5K more to go.] This week's ThTh posting is a book review by the Rev. Dr. William G. Moorhead, Senior Pastor, Pacific Hills Lutheran Church, Omaha, Nebraska.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation,
by Barbara R. Rossing. Boulder CO: Westview Press. 2004.

Hardcover, 212 pages. US\$24.

Barbara R. Rossing is ordained clergy in the ELCA, an associate professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and a former chaplain at Harvard Divinity School. She earned her doctorate at Harvard University Divinity School and her Masters of Divinity degree at Yale University Divinity School. Rossing and her book have been featured on CBS' 60

Minutes II in a segment titled, "The Greatest Story Ever Sold."

This book has been out about a year, but I first learned of it when Ed and Marie Schroeder were our house guests in early April, 2005. One thing leads to another, so here is my review. The book is well done and worth reading (with a group even), but not without a few flaws.

Call me naive, not to mention amillennialist, but without Rossing's book (and a little web surfing), I would have had no idea just how much rapture theology dominates mainstream conservative American religious thought. If you visit www.raptureletter.com, for example, you can arrange to have a letter e-mailed to your family and friends (at least those who did not change their e-mail address or who did not get raptured themselves), explaining your absence, and the absence of millions of others, after the rapture. I will bet they will have the basic fact figured out, though, by the time they get the e-mail. There is also a Rapture Index on the web, a kind of Dow Jones of end times activity (www.raptureready.com). And you have probably seen the bumper sticker at one time or another: In case of Rapture, this car will be driverless.

It does not take Rossing long to get to her point. "The rapture is a racket" (p.1). "This theology is not biblical" (p.2). Rapture theology, a distortion of the Christian faith, uses very selective literalism in its (mis) use of Scripture. It is escapist interpretation and the very opposite of the message of Revelation, which the Church must reclaim from future-fabricating fundamentalists. It is destructive for theology, ethics, and the politics of the Middle East, the latter especially since the formation of the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948 (she identifies one kind of disastrous political consequence as "Christian Zionism" and claims that such requires war rather than peace plans). It is the Bible (I

would say the Gospel) that gets left behind. OK, Barbara, tell us what you really think! (And, dear reader, do not expect rapture groupies to be convinced. To them, Rossing and her kind are exactly the kind of dark side, obstructionist theological folk who will be left behind, as Hal Lindsey once suggested in an interview.

Rossing first traces the history of fabricated rapture/dispensationalist/premillennialist theology (seven dispensations and the double return of Christ that sandwich a seven-year period of tribulation; the first return is the rapture; the second begins Christ's 1000-year reign from Jerusalem). She begins about 1830 with British evangelical cleric John Nelson Darby, who founded the Plymouth Brethren, noting rapture theology's major popularization through the Scofield Reference Bible (1909), and its dispensations and script for the future based on the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:27-29, and concludes with the writings of Hal Lindsey (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, 1970) and Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, co-authors of the mega-popular *Left Behind* series – 12 books, well over 60 million copies – of the last ten years. (Jenkins' *SOON* trilogy is similar in perspective.) Rossing's overview of this history over the past 170 years is excellent, tying several contributing factors into a coherent, basic whole, even if the theology itself is a pastiche of Bible texts ripped out of context and improperly exegeted.

Rossing also commendably contrasts the biblical picture (mostly from Revelation, with which Rossing must be most familiar through her teaching) of a God who, rather than snatching people from the earth before he destroys it, comes to live with us on the earth through the incarnated, resurrected, conquering Jesus/Lamb. The Bible's picture is of a "...God who is raptured down...a Rapture in reverse..." (p. 147). The incarnate, dwelling-with-us Lamb is the real Good News in the book of Revelation,

not the violent doomsday end-times scenario envisioned by rapturists. Other good news in her book is her excellent exegesis of such rapturist passages as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (in this text the Latin *raptio*. "caught up," is the root word for rapture) [Ed. my Latin dictionary for *raptio* = a carrying off, an abduction], John 14:1-2, and Matthew 24:39-42. (She opened my eyes here. I was well aware of the Matthew citation, but had never really connected the other two to the rapture. I guess I haven't read enough rapturist thought to really know.)

Very ably contrasted in another major section of Rossing's book is the Roman worship of victory (Victoria, Nike) and Revelation's insistence on the different kind of conquering effected by the Lamb. She describes how Left Behind ideology has hijacked Jesus' victory of the cross, turning it into the voyeurism that enjoys wrath and war. Rossing also takes us again on a tour of the New Jerusalem. It is in these sections that Rossing does her best work with John's apocalypse.

Rossing needed a tougher manuscript editor. It is somewhat repetitious in places. But at least the repetition is of her good points, so I will give her and her editor credit for not wanting us to lose sight of her themes. And I am glad that no instance of "Revelations" crept surreptitiously into the manuscript. Also, I would have been greatly helped by a glossary of both terms and persons, as well as an annotated bibliography for further reading. Along with these minor flaws, there are many happy surprises at every turn in this study. Rossing's critique of the "rapture racket" is thorough, readable, and detailed.

I do not think there has ever been a pastor who has not had a few votes for the book of Revelation when we ask, "OK, folks, which book of the Bible do we want to study next?" If it happens to you (and it will if you ask that question), have

Rossing's book handy. Since I have begun a tradition in recent years in my parish of studying a particular book or other theologically-connected piece with my Boards of Elders and Directors, this book is going to the top of the waiting list. If you do not mind my playing with some rapture themes here, I think I will not be waiting too long. And I am not going to be left behind.

[File this last item under what? Weird? Strange? After reading this book, and while writing this review, I had occasion to thumb through a recent edition of the Scofield Reference Bible. What caught my eye was one name on the editorial committee: W. G. Moorehead!! Different spelling of last name and no relation to this writer!]

365 Thursdays—7 Lean Years or 7 Fat Years? A Manipur Test Case

Colleagues,

365 Thursday Theology postings make exactly 7 years since it all began in 1998. One of you, noting that this anniversary was coming, and remembering Joseph's era in Egypt, asked: "Ed, were they 7 fat years or 7 lean years?" I didn't know how to answer. And then came this Aha! One way to find out is to follow Gideon. Set out a fleece. Ask the ThTh readership to celebrate the seven years by posing the "Manipur Option." And what, pray tell, is that? Thought you'd never ask.

It's all sevens: 7 years of ThTh. Add two more zeroes and you get 700, the number of you folks who receive this post. Add two more zeroes and you get the \$70,000 still needed for the five-year project in Manipur. And what, pray tell, is the Manipur Project? It's building from scratch a Christian school—nursery through grade ten—in the far northeast corner of India.

After you've gulped and caught your breath, read this:

PAST HISTORY

The Manipur Mission is a multi-faceted Christian venture that Marie and I—plus a couple dozen other partners—have been involved in since 2002 with Christian folk in India.

Manipur state is in NE India way up against the Burma (now Myanmar) border not far from China. Some 40 kilometers from Manipur's capital city Imphal is the tribal community of Khukthar. The present "Manipur Mission" now functioning there includes school, orphanage, evangelist training program, VBS programs in several venues, et al. There are 10 people on the staff. Since 2002 the couple dozen of us stateside partners have been gathering and sending \$15K per year to Manipur.

How on earth did we get connected there?

Husband and wife leaders in Khukthar, Roel and Shangthar Moyol, were my students in 2002 when I taught for a semester in New Haven CT at the Overseas Ministries Study Center. OMSC is an international ecumenical mission think-tank across the street from Yale Divinity School. Toward the end of our time at OMSC the Moyols laid out for us their work in Manipur and asked us to help them. We agreed to do what we could. The \$15K per annum since then is the result.

Roel and Shangthar are tribal folks (beautiful people with

Tibeto-Burman features) from the “hill country” of this nobody-knows-about corner of India. Check your world atlas. It’s east of Bangladesh. They are working to better the lives of their fellow tribals by taking in orphans and running an English school for other children. All of this as Christian care and education. They also run an evangelism and church leadership school. Plus other Christian sorts of stuff—both out in the hill country and in the Manipur state capital of Imphal (pop. 250,000).

Marie and I visited them last year during our five months in Southeast Asia. We were based as ELCA Global Mission Volunteers with the Lutheran Church in Singapore. [Imphal wasn’t exactly close: It’s 2300 miles away from Singapore. But we got there.] I was the commencement speaker for their evangelism /leadership graduation ceremony. Topic: “Christ’s Upside-Down Pyramid for Church-leadership.” Roel also had us do Crossings with two groups in Imphal. We’ve got digital pics if you are interested. We were impressed with how much they could accomplish with such modest funds.

When we asked Roel and Shangthar what they were going to do for support after the two of us “went to heaven,” their jaws dropped. They’d never thought about that. They said they would think and pray about it. March 1 their prayers (and deliberations with architects and engineers) were far enough along that they sent us what’s pasted here below. A faith-based venture for becoming self-supporting.

THE DREAM PROPOSAL

It’s a whole school, campus and staff—nursery through grade 10 (that’s the normal end of high school)—for 500 students when completed. End of March they sent us a cost estimate from professionals who have gone to work on their dream-school. We’ve

translated their Indian rupee figures into US dollars. Specs are \$115K (115,000 USD) needed over 5 years until it's fully operational. \$45K to get the first year up and running.

Roel and Shangthar admit that such sums of money are unimaginable for them. He gets \$2 per day (\$60 per month) as the director (and highest paid person) of the now-running mission operation. They've done their homework, and project that the school—and the whole mission operation—can be self-supporting after 5 years

Marie and I have been talking to lots of folks since March 1. We haven't told Roel and Shangthar that we'll even try to do it, but that we are casting about to see what seems possible. But it's becoming increasingly clear that we can't say No. Our past tincup ventures have never been that big. Though \$115K for a complete campus and staff for 500 students, et al, is hardly big bucks by American standards. But how to raise \$115K?

We started with our current donors. They overwhelmed us! First off, they pledged to continue to cover the \$15K per annum needed for the next 5 years for current "normal" operations. Then they also pledged \$45K over five years for the school. Just a couple dozen folks! So \$70K is still needed to make the school a reality—over the next 5 years. If you've read this far, you know what's coming.

THE SEVEN YEAR PITCH

Back to the SEVENS—7 years of Thursday Theologies, the 700 of you and these \$70,000.

Can you at this time celebrate ThTh's 7 years and join the group of Manipur Partners?

Might Manipur be a candidate for your own mission work—or for

your community, or for your mission-minded Aunt Sophie? Either as a one-time donation, or a pledge for the years ahead till its completion.

Please let us know at this e-address: <mehs55@cs.com>

For the past years our Manipur funds have been channelled through International Partners in Mission (Cleveland, Ohio). Contributions to IPM are tax-deductible in the USA. We're still negotiating with them the details for handling this big project. As soon as we've got things firmed up, we'll pass on to you what the next step would be. If you "can't wait," make your check out to International Partners in Mission, notation "Manipur school," and send it first to us so we can "read" the fleece. We'll pass it on to IPM. Our address: M&E Schroeder, 3438 Russell Blvd. #403, St. Louis MO 63104-1563, USA.

If/when \$70K does show up on the Manipur fleece, we'll tell you right away, and close the campaign. [Or possibly tell you about a couple more Macedonian calls that have come our way.]

The basic info-letters from Roel & Shangthar are appended below. If you need to know more, ask us.

Peace & Joy!

Marie & Ed Schroeder

<mehs55@cs.com>

THE PROJECT PROPOSAL FROM MANIPUR

Tuesday, March 1, 2005

Dearest Ed & Marie,

Greetings from Khukthar, Manipur in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

We have been praying for a long-term ministry. It is our believed that this ministry will help us to glorify His name and in the extension of His Kingdom. The proposed project will not deferred our existing ministry but rather it will enhance our ministry.

The Project:

The project is proposed to establish a High School from Nursery to class ten. Apart from High School, a few other projects interconnected with the welfare of orphans and destitute children and Leadership training also have been discussed herein.

Project Goal:

To glorify God through reaching children for Christ, training them to grow mentally, spiritually, and physically strong to serve Christ and our nation in future.

Project Objectives:

- i. To train children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).*
- ii. To provide a quality education to face a competitive world.*
- iii. To collect tuition fees for self-support.*
- iv. To foster the welfare of the orphans and destitute children.*
- v. To conduct Vacation Bible School for children, Lay Leadership Training, and assist evangelism work.*

Scope of the project:

The Government Schools in Manipur cannot provide a quality education. The teachers are irregular in attendance and when they attend school, they do not care about the academic of the students. The students have become inarticulate to face the competitive world. Many parents are not happy with the government teachers, and are not interested in sending their children to the government schools. They are willing to send their children to the school; where quality education is imparted, and at the same time they want their children to bring them up in a spiritual surroundings. Hence, we see the need and planned to start High School where we will emphasis on quality education and spiritual growth atmosphere. The school will be a co-education and for residence and non-residence students. We will also include an extra curriculum, which will help them in their future endeavor. Through the tuition fees and residence fees collected from the students, we will be able to run the ministry of conducting VBS, Lay Leadership Training, looking after orphans and destitute children and in Evangelism works every year and in the long run.

Project cost:

At the initial stage we need money for school building construction, boarding building for both girls and boys, furniture, infrastructure, office, study cum library room, chapel hall, bathroom & toilets, and salary for the teaching and non teaching staffs (for seven teachers and for four years). At the initial stage we will start from Nursery to class six. There will be ten teachers. Every year we will upgrade one more class and by 2010 we will upgrade up to class ten. In 2006 we expect 100 students. By 2010 we will have more than five hundred students. By that time we will be able to run the school with self-support. We are asking an engineer to draw and estimate the cost of the project. It is not finish yet. When it is finish I shall send you soon.

Project Funding:

Our prayer to God is to entrust Rev. Ed & Marie Schroeder to raise funds for this project. We have not coined the name of the school. ONE Request, We like to name the school if there is any person willing to donate in the memory of their loved ones/trust/organization. If they don't want their name to be written we are willing to name according to our like.

Opening Date of the school:

February 05, 2006

Through this project we will have a long run ministry. We will be able to continue our ministry by His grace. This is our proposed project. And our prayer is that God will honour our humble project through your kind raising of funds.

Yours always in HIM.

*Roel & Shangthar Moyol
Khukthar, P.O. Pallel
Manipur, 795 135
India*

[End of March came this e-mail.]

March 30, 2005

*Dear in Christ,
Greetings from Manipur In the name of Jesus Christ.*

I have read a book by Poovey on the "Day Before Easter." I learn especially about the Ash Wednesday, and the Lent. I have

never observed nor do I know about the significance of Ash Wednesday and about Lent till I read the book which you had sent to me. It is very good and I explain about the significances of the Lent in the church.

Shangthar and I sat together and pray about the School Project. We had asked a local engineer regarding the cost of construction. He estimated the amount which is very very big to us and we prayed to God how it is going to be possible. The Lord seems like responding to us that if the amount is so big you can begin step by step.

Let me unfold the estimated budget. The construction for both School Building From Nursery to Class ten will cost Rs.34,11,096.00 (Rupees thirty four lakhs eleven thousand and ninety six). For Boarding/Residence for Children building will cost Rs.16,22,604.00. Total Rs.50,33,700.00 [=US\$115,000] [Ed: "lakh" is the favored way to express 100,000 in India. Another Indian "big number" is "crore." A crore = 100 lakhs = 10 million.]

This estimated budget is for a period of five years.

The first year amount will be Rs.20,00,000.00 (Rupees twenty lakhs) [= US\$45, 727] and this will help us to construct a School building up to class six with children Residence building. The school session starts from February, so we need to start the construction from the months of October/November so that we could finish the construction before the school reopens.

We are praying that the Lord will raise people for the well being of the tribal people in Manipur so as to uplift their living conditions and at the same time help the poor and destitute children in Christ.

With prayer and wishes

Roel & Shangthar

*Indigenous Tribal Development Association [= the legal
“secular” name of the mission]*

Khukthar, P.O. Pallel

Manipur, India – 795 135